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# **WHEN IS A BULLY NOT A BULLY?**

## **A CRITICAL GROUNDED THEORY APPROACH TO UNDERSTANDING THE LIVED EXPERIENCE AND ORGANISATIONAL IMPLICATIONS OF BEING ACCUSED OF BEING A WORKPLACE BULLY**

**FRANCES-LOUISE McGREGOR**

A thesis submitted to the University of Huddersfield in partial fulfilment of the requirements  
for the Professional Doctorate degree of Doctor of Business Administration

The University of Huddersfield

Submission date May 2015

Volume 1 of 3

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# Abstract

This research addresses the question “When is a bully not a bully?” through grounded theory using a purposive sample of volunteer participants who had been accused of workplace bullying. The aim of the study was to critically evaluate the lived experience and organisational implications of being accused of being a workplace bully, from the perspective of the (alleged) bully. The research did not set out to consider if an (alleged) bully had been guilty or innocent of the allegation put to them; it was considered that if this was deemed a criteria by the potential participant it may reduce engagement with the study.

This study will contribute to the body of knowledge around the phenomenon of bullying and offers an insight into both research and further development of good organisational practice. Whilst the research on other parties involved in the issue and management of workplace bullying have developed, Einarsen (2014), Jenkins, Zapf, Winefield and Sarris (2012), Notelaers (2014) and Samnani and Singh (2012) express concern that research which explores and examines the perpetrator’s experience is scarce and needed as a priority in acknowledging the gap in current research and to develop a fuller understanding of the phenomena of workplace bullying.

In a qualitative study with eight participants from a particularly difficult to access group, the researcher offers an early contribution to the current gap in literature, research and understanding of the perspective of the alleged workplace bully. Participants engaged in individual, confidential, unstructured interviews with the researcher and spoke candidly about their perceptions and the impact the accusation had on them. This was then analysed, evaluated and developed through a classical grounded theory approach to develop the theoretical model *guilty until proven innocent*. In discussing the participants’ concerns in this model, the research widened understanding and academic knowledge and narrowed the gap of information of the (alleged) bully’s perspective. In dealing with allegations, (alleged) workplace bullies identify with concerns of *feeling bullied back*, *emotional reactions*, *self-coping mechanisms* and *managerial responsibility and action*, from which the grounded theory *guilty until proven innocent* emerged.

The main findings of the research emerged from the participant’s interviews; key highlights included being isolated by their organisations and subject to negative acts which would, in themselves be considered bullying behaviours. Participants then described how they would separate themselves from the organisation, despite feeling a sense of *disconnected loyalty* towards it. The structure of HR functions and the anti-bullying related policy had a significant influence on the negative treatment participant’s experienced, with a continual theme around the presumption the participant was guilty from the outset, by virtue of an allegation being raised. This perception was reinforced in the different way (alleged) bullies were supported and treated by their organisations from the claimants. The participants had been negatively affected by identifiable victim effect (Hamilton & Sherman, 1996), dispute-related claims (Einarsen, 1999; Keashly & Nowell, 2003) and the claimant being managed under a separate formal management procedure. The study also suggested that allegations of bullying could in themselves be a form of bullying and that there may be an element of discrimination in this on the grounds of protected characteristics.

The main recommendations consider the structure of HR functions and the need for a visible and accessible personnel element necessary to begin to balance the support available for all

parties, including the alleged, the alleged, bystanders, witnesses, line managers, HR and investigation managers.

Further research, which tests the grounded theory of *guilty until proven innocent* with larger samples will extend and develop this study and test some of the resolutions and solutions offered.

## **DBA Content Overview**

This submission for the University of Huddersfield Professional Doctorate, Doctor of Business Administration is presented in three volumes.

Volume one is the thesis entitled "When is a bully not a bully? A critical grounded theory approach to understanding the lived experience and organisational implications of being accused of being a workplace bully".

Volume two is the personal and professional impact statement which provides a reflective piece which complements the contribution to knowledge and professional practice. In viewing the researcher's professional doctorate journey from a reflective and reflexive position the impact statement focuses on research interests, personal and autonomous learning and the action learning approach which was a key part of the Doctor of Business Administration programme.

Volume three presents the prepared, publishable journal article for The Grounded Theory Review: An International Journal which will be submitted post viva voce. The journal article is presented in Verdana 10 with APA 6<sup>th</sup> referencing in accordance with the publisher's requirements. There is also an introduction which discusses the journal's focus and relevance presented in this volume.

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And finally, last but by no means least, to Alastair to whom this thesis is dedicated. Simply, for everything, thank you.

## List of abbreviations

ACAS	Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service
BIS	Department for Business, Innovation & Skills, UK Government
BME	Black and minority ethnic
CBI	Confederation of British Industry
CIPD	Chartered Institute for Personnel and Development
EAP	Employee Assistance Programme
GP	General Practitioner (Medical doctor)
HMCTS	Her Majesty's (HM) Courts & Tribunals Service
HRBP	Human Resource Business Partner
LGB	Lesbian, gay and bisexual
LIPT	Leymann Inventory of Psychological Terrorization
NAQ	Negative Acts Questionnaire
NAQ-R	Negative Acts Questionnaire – Revised
NHS	National Health Service
PTSD	Post Traumatic Stress Disorder
THOR	The Health and Occupation Research
UK	United Kingdom

# **Chapter 1: Introduction**

## ***1.1 Chapter overview***

This introduction chapter has two intentions; the first is to provide an overview for the thesis, broadly outlining the importance and relevance of the study, contextualising this through the researcher's interest and the contribution to knowledge and professional practice. Section 1 considers this overview and Section 2 explains the rationale for the study. Section 3 discusses the contribution to knowledge and practice which the research offers.

The second intention is to present a brief outline for the remainder of the thesis on a chapter by chapter basis in Section 4, which is followed by a short chapter synopsis.

## ***1.2 Thesis overview – Section 1***

The overall purpose of this research was to critically evaluate the lived experience and organisational implications of being accused of being a workplace bully, from the perspective of the (alleged) bully. There was no requirement for participants to have been deemed 'guilty' or 'innocent' (or to state this prior to, or during participation) as a result of the allegation as this was not the purpose of the study. Indeed, to have set a criteria for establishing this before the research interview may well have curtailed the participant's explanations or resulted in them not entering or withdrawing from the research.

For the last century research which considered human behaviour in the workplace has added understanding and value to organisations and the workers themselves. Since 1990, the focus on workplace bullying developed when Leymann (1990) established a similarity between playground bullying and bullying behaviours in the workplace. In essence, workplace bullying is considered to occur when a worker is subject to mistreatment by another worker that is persistent, regular and causes harm (Rayner & Keashley, 2005). The thesis reviews how the development of definitions of workplace bullying are critiqued and reviewed, discussing how possible misunderstandings and influences take shape through the lack of a universally ""accepted" definition" (Rayner & Cooper, 1997 p.211).

In reviewing limited extant literature of bully's experiences, this primary research presents considerable insight into (alleged) bullies' views and experiences. These were developed

through grounded theory and the methodology provides a theoretical framework which explains the alleged bully's concerns and considers how these might be addressed. In doing so, the research demonstrates a contribution to knowledge and to professional operational practice concerned with the holistic management of workplace bullying. The gap in knowledge from the (alleged) bully's perspective is narrowed as more is learned and understood, but also widened as more avenues for further research emerge as a result of the study.

When the researcher had undertaken earlier studies, the published academic and practitioner literature at that time had focused on the support, investigation and management from the claimant's perspective and the business case for effective management of workplace bullying within organisations. Relatively recently, there have been discussions on closed professional social media platforms raising issues connected with the veracity of bullying allegations. Practitioners are using these channels to voice concerns of the increase of instances where an allegation of workplace bullying is raised in order to prevent or frustrate another formal organisational process, such as misconduct, performance management, probationary period completion, absence, attendance, selection for at risk of redundancy and so on (CIPD Professional Communities discussion boards, 2007, 2008a, 2008b, 2011, 2012a, 2012b, 2013a, 2013b, 2013c, 2014; LinkedIn People Management Group, 2012, 2013). With this in mind, the research addresses both a contemporary and important area of human research (HR) management.

The researcher first became interested in bullying in the workplace whilst working on a secondment from a major high street bank to their recognised trade union and continued to develop research when her career moved to the public sector. Whilst the researcher was later working with police forces she formalised her experience and read for a Master of Arts degree in Human Resource Management. This in turn also led to the completion of an HR professional CIPD qualification and Chartered Fellowship of the Institute. The researcher's interest in the field of bullying and workplace disharmony increased when she saw the similarities and differences in the way issues surrounding bullying were accepted (or not), investigated, considered and managed by the two organisations, one in the public and the other the private sector. Organisations in the UK have been cognisant of the Government's Comprehensive Spending Review pressures or of restricted resources and less employment security (HM Treasury, 2013; Hoel & Salin, 2003). There is a growing body of concern and opinion around whether organisations can continue to view bullying in line with accepted definitions (Adams, 1992; Einarsen & Skogstad, 1996; Rayner, 2007; Unite, 2012) or whether there needs to be a review and revision. Furthermore, the 'total cost' of not resolving bullying claims



satisfactorily is not only something the researcher has heard before in her operational dealings, but is recognised by organisations (CIPD, 2005) as they seek to manage on leaner resources. In a comprehensive paper, Giga, Hoel and Lewis (2008) discussed the widest range of costs that resulted from workplace bullying, including absence, attrition, employment tribunal claims, lower production, reputational damage, settlement payments, under performance.

From a practitioner perspective, what had also interested the researcher to study the field of workplace bullying and in the submission of the Professional Doctorate proposal was the seeming lack of progress in reducing the amount of workplace bullying. Despite there being a plethora of good practice, good advice and constructive, valuable research, there seemed to only be an escalation. Acknowledging that workplace support and good HR policies have, rightly informed, encouraged and supported claimants/accusers. However, there is still an increase, despite this, which cannot be effective for the organisation or the individuals involved; Guest and Woodrow (2012, p.115) are concerned that the levels of bullying reported have “remained stubbornly high”.

The impact of not managing bullying allegations satisfactorily, not just in terms of the organisation but also that of the individuals concerned the researcher; whilst working as a seconded representative between bank and trade union, she was involved in supporting colleagues who were both the accused and the accuser and is able to discuss the impact on either party as rendering them less than wholly effective both at work and at home. Whilst the researcher has experience of organisational representation and management of workplace bullying claims, investigations and outcomes, this is bracketed and set aside (Glaser, 1978, 1992; Tufford & Newman, 2010) to investigate the perspective of the alleged bully.

In the main, significant quantities of literature and research (CIPD, 2005, 2015a; Einarsen, Hoel, Zapf & Cooper, 2003; Einarsen & Skogstad, 1996; Rayner, 2007) have focused on the need for the employer to support a claimant and for organisations to promote zero tolerance approaches to bullying (Wolters Kluwer (UK) Limited, in Croner, 2007). Contrasted with this were two seminal investigations by Jenkins (2011) and Jenkins, Zapf, Winefield and Sarris (2012) which considered the issue of workplace bullying from the perspective of the accused and confirmed that there was little other published work into this area of the field. “There appears to be very little research that gives the perpetrator’s explanation of their own behaviour or indeed the behaviour of the target” (Jenkins et al. 2012, p.489). It is interesting

to note that research which discusses the characteristics, traits, practices, behaviours and experiences of bullies has been based on the reflections of the targets, witnesses and bystanders rather than the perpetrator directly (Coyne, Smith-Lee Chong, Seigne & Randall, 2003; Einarsen et al. (2003)) however it is understandable that the (alleged) bully is likely to sit within a 'hard to reach' group of participants.

There can be contextual reasons in organisations why somebody may want to stop an organisational formal policy or procedure and, as they cannot accuse the organisation, the person acting on the organisation's instruction or behalf becomes the target of the allegation (McCarthy, Henderson, Sheehan & Barker, 2002). Liefoghe and Mackenzie-Davey (2001) propose that in seeking an outlet to express dissatisfaction with workplace or organisational related issues, workers will raise allegations and cite bullying as their grievance. Similarly, the discussions around claims intended to frustrate a formal organisational process, or ones which are vexatious or malicious do not seem to be reported or researched yet and the perspective of the (alleged) bully especially so.

### ***1.3 Rationale for the study – Section 2***

The rationale for this research was to consider the perspective of the (alleged) workplace bully. The researcher acknowledges there are other perspectives which include the alleged, target, bystander, witness, line manager, investigating manager, HR function and the organisation itself. It is usual to see research which involves these other perspectives, however there are few studies which consider the (alleged) bully (Jenkins et al., 2012). Emerging research, involving (alleged) bullies is beginning to shed light onto this new dimension and the researcher seeks to contribute to this field of study through this research.

An important issue for organisations and one which should be addressed and challenged; workplace bullying has been recognised as a destructive and damaging phenomena. There has been much constructive and positive research from academic and practitioner sources however, the problem remains resolute and has not diminished. Research has demonstrated prevalence of 10.5% of workers bullied in a preceding six month period and 24.4% of participants reported they had been subject of bullying in the last five years (Hoel & Cooper, 2000). Rayner and Keashly (2005) reported that 30% of workers in a British study they were regularly and for over at least six months subjected to negative behavior and that half of these participants would consider they had been bullied.

Definitions of workplace bullying differ, but within a defined set of parameters up to 8% of workers are bullied at any one time (Mikkelsen & Einarsen, 2001) whilst in an American study, Fox and Stallworth (2005), with a less rigid assessment framework, suggest prevalence is in excess of 95% of workers reporting their experiences of bullying over the previous five years.

Workplace bullying not only affects those who are the target of the negative acts or bullying behaviours, but those around them also suffer (Einarsen, 1999, 2000; Rayner, 2007). The impact of being a bystander or witness can have a similar negative and distressing effect and all this can, in turn affect the organisation's ability to manage and achieve its goals. D'Cruz and Noronha (2011, p.270) reported the impact of workplace bullying on bystanders led to "increased stress, lower motivation, job satisfaction, commitment, efficiency and productivity." Workplace bullying is also linked to ill-health (Bjorkqvist, Osterman and Lagerspetz, 1994; Notelaers, Einarsen, De Witte & Vermunt, 2006; Quine, 2001). Research has seemingly not considered whether similar impact, costs and consequences also apply to the (alleged) bully.

There has been a research focus on workplace bullying for some 25 years now and this has garnered much in terms of knowledge and understanding in order that good advice and recommendations have been offered, although with limited consideration for the perspective of the (alleged) bully (Einarsen, 2014; Lewis, 2014; Salin, 2014). Comprehensive assessments of the costs and consequences arising from workplace bullying have been undertaken (Giga et al., 2006) with eye-wateringly high financial penalties as well as a clear review of individual, organisational and wider societal costs. Financial awards have been made by the UK courts; a substantial award made in the High Court in the case of Green v DB Group Services (UK) Limited (2006) was in excess of £850,000. As mentioned, the personal stakes are also high and extend beyond the alleged, the alleged and the workplace to include their family and friends (Duffy & Sperry, 2007; Einarsen, 1999).

The focus of the study was to allow a platform for (alleged) bullies to share their experiences of being accused and to consider how understanding their perspectives could contribute to knowledge and understanding. Taking a grounded theory methodology the researcher presents a theoretical framework which explains what the primary concerns of the (alleged) bullies are, with considerations as to how these concerns can be mediated or moderated by the support of organisations. The development of practical recommendations offers support to and suggestions for good organisational practice.

One particular consideration in designing the study was that it would not be appropriate to limit the participants' discussions in any way and an assessment of guilt may inadvertently, consciously or subconsciously create this. It is not the role of the researcher or the study to consider or attempt to apportion blame on either side; some of the participants in this research were not proven to have been a bully, others were. It was important that the research offered an opportunity for participants, regardless of the outcome of their being accused, to tell their story in order for the research to offer insight and gain an understanding into the point of view of the (alleged) bully. This is not to say that the research or researcher takes a sympathetic position; rather views are bracketed (Glaser, 1978, 1992; Tufford & Newman, 2010) in order to critically develop resolutions and solutions to address workplace bullying, so that the experience of the bully is heard.

### ***1.4 Contribution to knowledge and professional practice – Section 3***

This research contributes to the extant literature in the field of workplace bullying as it meets the needs of the identified 'gap' in other research to date. The need to understand the perspective of the bully at first hand was a recurring theme at the International Association of Workplace Bullying and Harassment Conference held in 2014, where seminal, respected academics (Einarsen, 2014; Jenkins, et al., 2012; Lewis, 2014; Salin, 2014) in the field noted the importance of researching with bullies (whether proven or not) as essential in the quest to understand, reduce and eradicate workplace bullying.

In researching with a small group of participants accused of being workplace bullies, this study widens the knowledge and understanding we have of those accused from their first hand descriptions and experience. The research findings develop a critical discussion and note the contributions to knowledge and practice. Suggestions for further research into the primary concerns of (alleged) bullies are recommended.

### ***1.5 Thesis structure – Section 4***

This research and thesis followed a classical Glaserian approach in terms of methodology, methods, data analysis and literature review, however, the thesis is presented in a more traditional structure, to accord with scholarly convention and to provide readers with a deeper understanding of available literature. Although the literature review was developed alongside the later stages of analysis, the discussions in the methodology and approach to data analysis illustrate why this was appropriate and in accord with the grounded theory principles. The

thesis is structured with eight chapters. This first introductory chapter presents the background, introduction and brief rationale for the study.

The second chapter presents the literature review which critically evaluates current definitions and meanings of the phenomenon of workplace bullying with a focus on the work which considers the accused/alleged bully. The literature review also considers current workplace procedures, processes and practices for dealing with allegations and cases of workplace bullying. It should be noted that this literature review was completed after data collection and alongside the development of categories and core category in the analysis of findings. This accords with the grounded theory methodology and methods adopted, but as the second major chapter in the thesis, it is presented in a traditional structure in order that it is recognisable and the structure is clear.

The third chapter is divided into the methodology and research methods, where the rationale for classical grounded theory is debated and justified. The qualitative data collection methods, ethical issues, sampling, restricted participant data, unstructured interviewing, fit, workability, relevance and modifiability (Glaser, 1998) are also discussed and evaluated.

Chapter four extends the grounded theory methodology to explain how the study was progressed with the analysis of gathered field notes and memos, constant comparison and how coding was developed. In considering theoretical sampling and theoretical sensitivity, the chapter discusses the development of the core category and develops the grounded theory explaining the primary concern of the accused (alleged) workplace bully.

The fifth chapter presents the primary findings of the study in a format which Glaser (1998) presented as a conceptual theory of explanation.

The research findings are presented in chapter five and are critiqued with extant literature in the discussions and conclusions chapters which follow. These chapters discuss the insight this has given and how it can positively impact on the development of further research and how organisational policy, practice and procedure can be progressed. In summarising the participant's social problems when an allegation of workplace bullying is lodged and the subsequent procedural practices, the theory discusses how these main problems or concerns are addressed.

Chapter six offers the discussion which brings together the categories and dimensions of the emergent grounded theory from the study to locate it in the context of wider extant literature through an in-depth review of the research findings. This culminates with the development through grounded theory of a theoretical framework.

The seventh chapter presents the conclusions of the study and discusses the limitations of the study, noting that further confirmatory research is needed in this newly researched area of the phenomena of workplace bullying. Chapter seven also offers suggestions for the direction of further research which stem from this research.

The final chapter, chapter eight, gives recommendations and discusses how key HR or industry practitioners may develop their organisational policy, procedure or practice to address the key concerns which the (alleged) workplace bullies discussed. In a final conclusion chapter eight demonstrates that the research has been valuable in terms of heightening awareness of the issues and concerns that (alleged) bully's face. Recommendations suggest how organisations can use this learning to good effect in the pursuit of reduction and good practice around the holistic management of workplace bullying.

## ***1.6 Chapter synopsis***

This introductory chapter provided an overview of the thesis, discussing the academic, research and practical contributions it offers in considering an emerging area of interest in the field of workplace bullying as well as noting the value of the research in terms of contribution to knowledge and professional practice having identified a gap in research thus far. The discussion has demonstrated that the extant literature on the phenomena surrounding workplace bullying from the accused or (alleged) bully's perspective is underexplored.

This chapter also presented a framework for the structure of the thesis and the following chapter presents a critical literature review drawing on academic, practitioner and organisational sources.

## **Chapter 2: Literature review**

### ***2.1 Chapter overview***

In a grounded theory study, the literature review does not inform or guide the research; rather it is used to develop theoretical sensitivity (Glaser, 1998, 2013) as the participants' concerns emerge from the data to form concepts and categories.

The review of available literature identified that there has been descriptive research and debate about the definitions and understandings of 'bullying' as a concept. This is the same for individual and organisational research into the targets or victims (Einarsen, 1999) and the consequences of bullying for them. Within this research the term claimant or alleged is used to identify what literature in the main refers to as a target or victim. Research into experiences and consequences of being identified as a 'bully' is limited.

Therefore the literature review presented here evaluates what is available around the concept of bullying but is used to develop theoretical sensitivity only and the paucity of available information on the topic of the (alleged) bully's perspective provides little guidance for this specific study. However, critical evaluation of literature to define and understand the concept and to identify what is known from psychological and sociological perspectives, as well as organisational research is presented for completeness.

### ***2.2 Developments in the definitions of workplace bullying***

The phenomenon of workplace bullying has been of research interest for some 25 years since Leymann (1990) established a similarity between playground bullying and bullying behaviours in the workplace. Psychological studies on the nature of work and worker's health date back a century before that with the work of Sinclair (1906) and the Hawthorne Illumination Experiments of the 1920s (Levitt & List, 2011). The nature and importance of the phenomenon of workplace bullying now attracts attention from a range of interested parties, which may explain that whilst many definitions share common ground there is not a single universally accepted definition.

Workplace bullying has frequently been linked with harassment in organisational policies (ACAS, 2010; CIPD, 2015a; BIS, 2014; HSE, n.d.) which in the UK presents a need to clarify

what is and what is not legally defined and therefore protected. Whilst a legal definition for harassment is set out in the Equality Act 2010, there is no legal definition for bullying, be that in the workplace or otherwise and the link between the two is not the focus of this research. In seeking to review definitions for the purpose of this research, the researcher limited the review of literature to those which focus on bullying. Hershcovis (2011, p.510) noted different labelling could be applied for a range of workplace incivilities associated with research concerning workplace aggression; these included bullying as well as incivility, social undermining, interpersonal conflict, emotional abuse, violence and abusive supervision. Fevre, Lewis, Robinson and Jones (2013) question the fundamental choice of the label 'bullying' and how research participants engage with definitions of and what constitutes bullying. It is the concept of 'trouble at work' which Fevre et al. (2013) use as an umbrella term to focus awareness on incivility, ill-treatment, incivility, disrespect, violence, injury and workplace bullying, noting that the boundaries of each overlap and meld with one another, making a clear definition and option of what constitutes bullying difficult. Fevre et al. (2013, p.229) summarise this issue succinctly, noting "the concepts of bullying... are unable to capture all we know about troubles in the workplace." Initially, academic and research definitions were reviewed in order to locate the social construction of the phenomenon in extant literature, then moving to a review from recognised business/employer bodies.

Academic definitions for workplace bullying have developed and evolved; Brodsky's (1976) early recognition noted that harassed workers experience workplace bullying, which although was conceptually linked with harassment, it included the repeating of persistent attempts to torment, upset or construct discomfort an individual at work.

Rayner and Hoel (1997) noted that it was prevalent in definitions at that time for a focus on the repetition and unacceptable destructive behaviours, which were often aggressive in nature, which is how Randall (1997) considered his definition of bullying to include aggressive behaviours which came about from deliberate attempts to physically or psychologically distress. As research progressed, more subtle bullying behaviours were admitted into the definition, thus widening its scope. Salin (2003) extended the range with the inclusion of social isolation, silent treatment, spreading rumour or gossip, fault finding by virtue of people's private life or their characteristics (protected under the Equality Act 2010 or not), micro management or excessive criticism, partially or wholly withholding information, depriving responsibility and oral aggression. Whilst Zapf and Einarsen's (2001) research had previously advocated this extension, noting that 'banter', teasing and insulting others were also relevant, they felt it was necessary to include acts of physical aggression too. Recurrent



themes of persistent and repeated actions were noted throughout the evolution of definition and the definition widely used in literature now is:

Bullying at work means harassing, offending, socially excluding someone or negatively affecting someone's work tasks. In order for the label bullying (or mobbing) to be applied to a particular activity, interaction or process it has to occur repeatedly and regularly (e.g. weekly) and over a period of time (e.g. about six months). Bullying is an escalated process in the course of which the person confronted ends up in an inferior position and becomes the target of systematic negative social acts (Einarsen, Hoel, Zapf & Cooper, 2011, p22).

A key principle within this widely used definition is the concept that bullying is a situation described by Einarsen and Skogstad (1996) as being one where individuals are persistently and over a period of time treated in such a way they determine they are the subject of negative actions meted out by a bully (or bullies) and that the receiver is not able to effectively defend themselves against the actions. These objective and academic published definitions offer a more prescribed view as they clarify and describe the types of activity, the impact of such negative acts, of repetition and the on-going nature of bullying.

Academics, employers, organisations and their workers are all interested in the development of research which supports better work and working lives (CIPD, 2014). Central UK Government, the Health & Safety Executive, the Confederation of British Industry, Trades Unions, professional bodies including the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development continue to work with researchers in creating and upgrading policies, procedures, advice and good practice to mitigate the adverse impacts of workplace bullying which are significant.

Despite these strong links between the practitioner and academic authorities, there is an emergence of a more personal nature to the definitions presented by professional organisations and employee representative bodies; the interpretation of these offers further development. The CIPD (2005) definition broadens the scope in describing behaviour and outcomes, whilst omitting the academic views around frequency and repetition. There is an emphasis on unintended bullying, stating that it is not about intention, but that the outcome will have impacted on the receiver; this outcome may have caused psychological distress (CIPD, 2005). The term 'psychological distress' is noted as being "The end result of factors, e.g. psychogenic pain, internal conflicts and external stress that prevent a person from self-actualization and connecting with significant others" (On-line Dictionary of Modern Medicine, 2012). Matthiesen and Einarsen (2004), Rayner (2007) and Quine (2001) established that

effects of bullying include stress, but there should perhaps be an acknowledgement that stress is not an essential criterion of having been bullied.

The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD, 2005 p.6) presented their definition of workplace bullying as:

Bullying at work involves repeated negative actions and practices that are directed at one or more workers. The behaviours are unwelcome to the victim and undertaken in circumstances where the victim has difficulty in defending themselves. The behaviours may be carried out as a deliberate act or unconsciously. These behaviours cause humiliation, offence and distress to the victim. The outcomes of the bullying behaviours have been shown to cause psychological distress which affects social and work behaviours.

This CIPD (2005) definition removes the academic expectations of prescribed frequency and regularity and introduces the concept of the bullying possibly being unintentional. By broadening the parameters here, CIPD may well have engaged effectively in raising awareness within organisations and with staff and managers alike that workplace bullying will not be tolerated and progressing Einarsen and Skogstad's (1996) determination that it is for the person subject to the behaviour rather than the (alleged) bully who perpetrates it that will "be key to deciding whether bullying [or harassment] has taken place" (CIPD, 2005, p.6).

In discussing behaviours the victim would deem unwelcome, this definition explicitly describes the concept of 'in the eye of the beholder', positing that it is receiver who will determine whether they are being bullied or not. It is perhaps from this concept that Simons, Stark and DeMarco (2011, p.133) note that workplace bullying "occurs when an individual *perceives* negative actions directed at him or her from one or more persons, continuing over at least six months and when he/she has difficulty defending these actions". In this definition the HR professional body introduce the concept of how a 'victim' feels through personalising the definition from the victim's viewpoint.

Interestingly, some worker representative organisations' definitions have not been refined or reviewed for some years (Unite, 2012) and it may be appropriate to consider why this is the case. It may be that research has supported the expectation within the definition that bullying may result in stress for the bullied, be that a group of people or a single person.

Workplace bullying can be defined as persistent, unacceptable, offensive, intimidating, malicious, insulting or humiliating behaviour, abuse of power or authority which attempts to undermine an individual or group of employees and which may cause them to suffer stress (Amicus, 2007, now part of Unite, 2012).

Within this definition, we see the more overt description of unacceptable behaviours, these are powerful and more alarmist than the academic and professional body ones. There is also a suggestion that bullying is done consciously to undermine someone which links back with the previous versions that bring a focus to how the actions make the recipient feel and that it is done by someone in 'authority'. The specific criteria for frequency and repetition receive no mention other than a need to be 'persistent' in the Amicus (2007) definition, which perhaps moves us further away from a definition by which a consistent measurement can be taken.

Amicus merged with the Transport and General Workers Union in May 2007 to form Unite, the largest trades union in the UK (Unite, 2012). It could be telling of the global economic and financial crises (The Economist, 2013) that a decline in claims and cases has resulted in Unite not determining their own definition but reliant on the Health & Safety Executive and the Andrea Adams Trust (Amicus, 2007; Unite 2012).

Bullying is unwarranted, offensive, humiliating, undermining behaviour towards individuals or groups of employees: persistent, unpredictable, unfair and seemingly irrational, negative and malicious attacks on personal or professional performance; an abuse of power or position, causing such anxiety and emotional distress that self-confidence is eroded and physical and mental illness may ensue (Andrea Adams Trust, 1997).

The Andrea Adams Trust offered personal support to individual workers who felt they were subject to bullying (or harassment) in their workplace until 2007 when the charitable trust closed and became a training consultancy offering services to employers on how they could prevent bullying in their organisations and understand the ramifications on business performance of an inappropriate workplace culture (Andrea Adams Consultancy, 2015). Despite the move from support of individuals to organisations, the Trust's original definition of workplace bullying is still in use (Unite, 2012).

This Andrea Adams Trust (1997) definition progressed the notion of the need for there to be a power imbalance between the target and perpetrator which is abused and that the impact on the target is significant in terms of the erosion of self-confidence due to anxiety and emotional distress. Other studies have shown that the notion of a power imbalance should not always be interpreted as suggesting a line management relationship but introduced the

ideas of upwards bullying (Lewis & Sheehan, 2003; Zapf, Einarsen, Hoel & Vartia, 2003; Rayner & Cooper, 2003) and horizontal bullying (Lewis & Sheehan, 2003).

The UK's Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS) definition, which has remained unchanged for some 15 years and, like the earlier definitions, it considers the bullying behaviours with the added concept of intent. "Bullying may be characterised as offensive, intimidating, malicious or insulting behaviour, an abuse or misuse of power through means intended to undermine, humiliate, denigrate or injure the recipient" (ACAS 2010, p.1). The theme of intent and that the bullying is purposefully, knowingly and consciously undertaken is progressed by Unite in a leaflet (2012) for members, where the definition is illustrated and widened:

Bullying is an abuse of power. Bullying in the workplace is the persistent ill treatment of an individual and an extreme form of abuse. Victims are competent, popular and are perceived as a threat to the bully who wants to control, subjugate and eliminate. The bully is a person who deliberately intimidates or persecutes someone they work with.

This further definition from Unite (2012) sits in direct opposition to the findings of Brent Council's work in creating an anti-bullying campaign (Truss, 2006) and Rayner's (2001) work for the UK Government's Department for Trade and Industry, Amicus and The Dignity at Work Partnership. Rayner (2007) proposed 80% of bullying stemmed from miscommunication that has escalated and that "very few perpetrators deliberately go out to make others' lives a misery" (Dignity at Work Partnership, 2007, p.9). The Unite (2012) definition is the most sensationalised and implies assumptions on the personal characteristics, ability and place in a social group of both parties; this is in positive terms for the 'victim' and very negative terms for the bully. It is understandable that a trade union would take a worker (rather than organisational) perspective, however both claimant and (alleged) bully are likely to be workers and therefore could be trade union members. As such, both would have rights of representation and an expectation for advice, guidance and support should they require it from their staff representative body and it may need to be acknowledged that managers may also be trade union members.

In comparing and contrasting the academic, organisational and employee representative definitions of workplace bullying, it became apparent that the latter was more sensationalised and of concern was the "liberal way the term [workplace bullying] is often used" (Jenkins et al., 2012 p.498). This could give rise to a lack of coherent understanding between participants and researchers, workers and their organisations, which is important when undertaking

research and in investigating allegations. For example, the definitions from Amicus (2007), omit to reference the key academic criteria of regularity and recurrence over time.

There seems to be an escalating trend in the personalising and sensationalising way the definitions of bullying are portrayed; the nearer (and perhaps the more accessible) to a worker the more explicit and victim focused the definitions become. An academic view is objective, seeking to set parameters for assessment and measurement, whereas CIPD (2005), developed a more liberal theme and discussed outcomes in terms of psychological distress. The employee representative groups and books providing advice to individuals seeking guidance on workplace bullying (Babiak & Hare, 2007; Clarke, 2008) move from these clearer, objective definitions to subjective ones. There is often an assumption of guilt and perception of the bully as a 'bad' person. Thus, organisational change, business processes, human resource policies or a possible vexatious intention of the claimant are often not considered or explored.

Moreover, the purpose in reviewing definitions in such detail is that there was an emergent theme from the participant data that focused on the issue that what is alleged as bullying, is not always the case. As such there is a danger that the essence of the definition becomes more diluted and sensationalised, it brings discredit (Jenkins et al. 2012) to the severity and destructive phenomenon particularly when contrasted with the more measured and critical Einarsen et al. (2011) definition of workplace bullying that is widely acknowledged. The concerns highlighted by Rayner and Hoel (1997) around the prevalence in definitions with an aggressive stance and focus on destructive behaviours seems still evident and in use today, despite much academic effort in redefining the phenomenon.

The definitions all describe workplace bullying but look at it from different perspectives. It seems that the views of all involved, the perpetrator or (alleged) bully, the 'victim' (Einarsen, 1999) line managers, HR staff, organisations and staff representative bodies have different views of what bullying is and how it is received. It is apparent however, that it has been the view or experience of the 'target' which determines whether it is bullying; it is their opinion, the way they have felt on the receiving end of the treatment.

Whilst many research papers discussing studies of workplace bullying note the diversity of definition (Einarsen et al., 2011; Hoel & Beale, 2006; Einarsen, Hoel, Zapf & Cooper, 2003; Rayner & Hoel, 1997; Zapf & Einarsen, 2011), there is an acceptance that it is necessary to

understand and clearly define workplace bullying within the purpose of any study (Hoel, Rayner & Cooper, 1999; Notelaers, 2014; Rayner, 1997). Having a clear and concise definition makes it possible to determine the foundation of responses, to take meaningful measurement and to present robust analysis and findings (Notelaers, 2014). It is important to clarify that this study, whilst appreciating the importance and relevance of a clear definition of terms by which workplace bullying will be considered, does not attest to one. This is because the focus of this research is on the experience of the accused and how they construct a reality and definition of their own.

## ***2.3 The measurement and prevalence of workplace bullying***

There are different measurement scales employed in workplace bullying studies. Whilst some take a rigorous approach to assessment, others will accept the view of the participant with or without a standard criteria by which each individual was reviewed against.

In 1994 a Norwegian study (Einarsen, Raknes & Matthiesen) established that workplace bullying was a prevalent phenomenon, having developed and established a set of scales, known as the Negative Acts Questionnaire (NAQ) (Einarsen & Raknes, 1991, 1997; Mikkelsen & Einarsen, 2001) which were later revised (Einarsen, Hoel & Notelaers, 2009). The NAQ/NAQ-R lists negative acts which participants may have experienced in the workplace with a range from subtle to overt acts. The NAQ/NAQ-R covers work related and person related acts and includes the dimensions of frequency and persistence. Researchers then determine whether participants were the subject of workplace bullying and in turn, label them as 'victim' (Einarsen, 1999) or 'target'.

The NAQ-R continues to be accredited as an academically sound scale for measuring workplace bullying (Hoel et al., 1999; Samnani & Singh, 2012), however Notelaers (2014) queried whether the questionnaires are still relevant today, asking the students at the IAWBH Conference's PhD Workshop (2014), "after all, how can you measure something if you don't know what you're measuring?" Researchers must be cautious and determine clearly what they are measuring; in seeking to measure workplace bullying, gathered data may relate to exposure to negative acts. This is not necessarily exposure to workplace bullying as the measurement of the phenomenon must achieve the highest standards of reliability, validity and other rigorous dimensions (Keashly & Harvey, 2005).

It is perhaps with this background knowledge that researchers understand the significant differentiation of prevalence rates in different studies (Hoel et al., 1999). Hoel and Cooper's (2000) study undertaken with a sample of 5,300 employees in 70 organisations revealed 47% of participants reported witnessing bullying in the last five years. One in ten (10.5%) said they had been bullied themselves in the last six months and almost one in four (24.4%) said they had been bullied in the last five years. Those who had reported bullying in the last six months consistently reported the lowest work attendance records, the poorest health, little or no motivation for work and poor contribution figures when they were in attendance,

compared to non-bullied colleagues. This impact on organisational costs supports the business case for the effective management of workplace bullying (Hoel & Cooper, 2000).

Research by public services union, Unison (2003), carried out a survey which found that two out of three respondents stated they had either witnessed or experienced bullying and that for 34% of those bullied it had been taking place for a period in excess of three years. At the same time, Einarsen et al. (2003) reviewed major European studies which had considered the prevalence of bullying in the workplace. The study suggested that the frequency of bullying occurrences had declined in more recent years despite there having been differences in the measurement method and research aims. Bjorkqvist et al., (1994) asked participants if they had been bullied up to a specific date and suggested prevalence between 10 and 17% and posited a prevalence of bullying between 14 and 53% in organisations. By contrast, Leymann (1990, 1996) used the Leymann Inventory of Psychological Terrorization (LIPT), a 45 item inventory, asking participants to consider on a weekly basis, over a six month time frame the frequency of bullying behaviour and determined a prevalence between 3 and 21% of workers were subject to bullying.

Lutgen-Sandvik, Tracy and Alberts' (2007) research in America reported prevalence of 47% whilst Fox and Stallworth (2005) reported a prevalence in excess of 95% of employees who had experienced general workplace bullying. In considering why this particularly high figure was reported in the Fox and Stallworth study, it is noteworthy that the research included a convenience sample comprising of 71% minority ethnic participants for a study which linked racism and bullying experienced over a five year timeframe.

European studies this century are beginning to evidence a smaller frequency rate; Makkensen von Astfield (2000) and Piirainen et al. (2000) separately used a precise definition of bullying and surmised a prevalence of between 1 and 4%. Mikkelsen and Einarsen (2001) used a definition as well as a measurement of behaviour and found between 1 and 8% of workers had experienced workplace bullying. In a meta-analysis undertaken by Nielsen et al. (2010), respondents noted that without the framework of a definition, up to 20% of employees would be subjected to negative social acts (teasing, taunting) which, although perhaps outside a stringent definition of bullying would still provide a relatively realistic prevalence.

Einarsen et al. (2011, p.78) considered a rate of 4% of "serious bullying" in an organisation a "serious number"; in a discussion they extrapolated that in an organisation with 1000



workers, this would amount to 40 people being bullied as well as a wider group of the perpetrators, the witnesses and potentially bystanders all involved to some degree.

Whilst there are large variations in the reported prevalence rates of workplace bullying, not all studies have used a standard, measurable definition of the phenomenon. Whilst it is important to measure 'like with like' to enable analysis of any reduction, perhaps some thought should be given to why measure such a subjective phenomenon, given the personal individuality of experience. The adverse effects of bullying behaviour will continue to impact on organisational achievement as well as the health, safety and well-being of all stakeholders and all parties involved.

## ***2.4 Features of workplace bullying***

Workplace bullying can take many forms and is not just an interaction between individuals, there are organisational factors within the workplace which can reinforce or silently encourage it. Bullying behaviour can be considered in five broad dimensions, which can be seen to overlap. These dimensions are overt acts, subtle acts, work related acts, person related acts and organisation factors which are described below.

### **2.4.1 Overt acts**

Overt acts of bullying include threats or actual violence; demands for resignation; insults; public humiliation; frequent or loud criticism; shouting; verbal assault (CIPD, 2015a; Rayner, 1997; Samnani & Singh, 2012). Neuman and Baron (1998) considered the overt acts of workplace bullying, particularly where aggression had been a feature were significantly clearer to investigate and identify. Bullying behaviours that include or involve violence, aggression and assault, whether threatened or actual, are the most infrequently reported acts of bullying in the workplace (Hannabus, 1998).

### **2.4.2 Subtle acts**

Subtle acts of bullying include being 'sent to Coventry', a euphemism for being ostracised, deliberately ignored, as if one no longer exists; teasing; gossip; banter (CIPD, 2015a; Rayner, 1997; Samnani & Singh, 2012). Arthur (2011) established that there is a range of bullying behaviours spanning overt to subtle acts, but that it is the subtle acts that are more commonly

experienced by targets. Bjorkqvist et al., (1994) determined acts of rumour, gossip, isolation, making threats to effective working and personal relationships, noting that these subtle bullying behaviours were not only the most prevalent acts but also the most problematic ones to identify and stop.

### **2.4.3 Work related acts**

Work related acts of bullying include micro managing; excessively tight supervision; giving too much or too little work; setting unrealistic targets; criticism of work (CIPD, 2015a; Rayner, 1997; Samnani & Singh, 2012). Failure to comply with professional codes of conduct and to encourage others to do the same (Vickers, 2014) undermines work efforts as a whole and is a work related act. Additionally the misuse of the legitimate authority can result in local policy variations which affect the target; for example limiting options for annual leave, not offering training and development opportunities, affecting promotion prospects.

### **2.4.4 Person related acts**

Person related acts of bullying include insults or jokes of a personal nature; the withholding of information pertinent or required to complete the task in hand; sending aggressive e-mails (CIPD, 2015a; Rayner, 1997; Samnani & Singh, 2012). Research has also demonstrated that members of black and minority ethnic (BME) groups experience higher instances of bullying than their non-BME colleagues (Fox & Stallworth, 2005; Lewis & Gunn, 2007). Hoel, Lewis & Einarsdottir (2014) established that lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) workers were twice as likely to be bullied as their non-LGB colleagues.

Salin (2003) discussed person related acts within contemporary organisational culture where an element of 'positional game playing' could be seen. This involved individuals not working in furtherance of organisational aims, objectives or performance requirements, but towards their own personal ends. This inappropriate, unacceptable conduct could be 'rewarded' when workers achieve the personal aim they set out to accomplish (Salin, 2003). Branch, Ramsay and Barker (2007a) expressed concern that this is in essence, the claimant or target's own bullying behaviour and the raising of an allegation of being bullied can be as a means to an end (Branch, Ramsay & Barker, 2007a).

### **2.4.5 Workplace factors**

CIPD (2005, 2011, 2015b) and Rayner (2007) suggest that workplace related factors which could be triggers for bullying include a lack of involvement or awareness by senior management; little participation (of staff) in decision making; fears of organisational change and the ensuing uncertainty around hours, status, pay, position; an extremely competitive and/or chauvinist targeted environment; poor development, learning or training for workers and managers which results in a deskilling of individuals or teams; no clear policies, codes of conduct or grievance resolution procedures. It is accepted that when organisational change is poorly communicated and managed, when there is frequent change and uncertainty then potential for upwards bullying is also enhanced. (Lewis & Sheehan, 2003; McCarthy, 1996; Sheehan, 1996, 1999). It is this uncertainty which Davenport, Distler-Schwartz and Pursell-Elliott (1999) noted caused workers to oppose supervisors or managers they perceived responsible for any existing insecurity within their organisation. Branch, Ramsay and Barker (2007b) concur positing that it is the intensified insecurity and ensuing stress that stems from organisational change and a lack of openness, transparency and communication which prompts workers to build their informal power base and use this to make allegations of bullying to counteract the formal organisational status of their manager.

An increase in allegations of workplace bullying was shown to occur when there was 'right' sizing of organisations and the paring back of layers of managerial hierarchy (Sheehan, 1999). Similarly, changes to processes and procedures within an organisation (Baron & Neuman, 1998) increased instances of workplace bullying. Perhaps less expected but of concern as organisations welcome a diverse workforce is that the introduction of female managerial staff (Hammond & Holton, 1993) has also been identified as being a trigger factor for workplace bullying.

## ***2.5 The antecedents of workplace bullying***

Much has been accomplished through research which has considered and categorised the antecedents and key characteristics of workplace bullying; this has enabled organisations, HR functions and staff representative groups to develop strategies to address the issues before and when they occur. In reviewing the literature on the antecedents of workplace bullying, there are predominantly two perspectives, that of the organisation itself and the other of the individuals involved. The individual perspectives include those of the target and the target's or researcher's views of the perpetrator however, this has not been undertaken with (alleged)

bullies. There is also acknowledgment of the antecedents and impact on witnesses or bystanders who observed the workplace bullying in the extant literature, although these perspectives have not been a feature in this research.

### **2.5.1 The target perspective**

In considering the antecedents relating to targets of bullying, research discussed below demonstrated that personality traits or characteristics give insight into the individual.

Di Martino, Hoel and Cooper (2003) established that targets of workplace bullying are likely to be introverts who are conscientious and submissive, having a low sense of self-esteem and likely to be anxious. Baumeister, Smart and Boden (1996) noted that targets would have less managerial support, less support from peers and little or no control over their working arrangements or schedule, which would fit with Di Martino et al.'s (2003) characteristics of targets being submissive and conscientious in order to meet set deadlines and work patterns. Einarsen (1999) cautions that it may be necessary to consider and establish which came first, the bullying or the characteristic; was an individual quiet and reserved before they were bullied or did this come as a result of having been bullied (Einarsen, 1999)?

Other personality traits common to targets of workplace bullying have been found to include shyness, low social skills and mental ill-health (Einarsen, Raknes & Matthiesen, 1994; Zapf, 1999; Zapf & Einarsen, 2003). Coyne, Seigne and Randall (2000) also noted that a target will often try to avoid conflict and present themselves as submissive and not be confrontational; they are seen as shy, discreet, reserved, apprehensive, delicate and find coping with difficult situations stressful. Hauge, Skogstad & Einarsen (2009) refuted that a target should be seen as a 'victim', suggesting they were not always shy, sensitive or silent, rather a target could be outgoing, popular, successful and a high achiever which engenders someone else's envy and therefore leaves them vulnerable to becoming a target.

Targets have also been considered to be socially inappropriate, infuriating, irritating or inflammatory (Andersson & Pearson, 1999; Matthiesen & Einarsen, 2007) but Linton and Power (2012) note these are also labels that could realistically also apply to the personas of bullies.

## **2.5.2 The perpetrator perspective**

A key limitation to understanding perpetrator perspectives is the paucity of research which has been undertaken with (alleged) bullies directly; despite this there is some comment and research supported opinion in this area of the field. Coyne et al. (2003) developed research which asked participants to nominate and self-nominate who they believed were perpetrators and victims of workplace bullying within their teams. Then, other participants were also asked to self-report on a colleague's behalf in order to verify the nominations. With teams of a mean average size of eight, Coyne et al. (2003) assumed that the participants would be likely to know each other sufficiently well to comment although the results were perhaps countered by the participants' concerns of anonymity and confidentiality. Coyne et al. (2003) suggested their research had identified a more reliable method to measure prevalence but the perspective of the bully (rather than another's opinion of the bully) required further development.

Perpetrators of workplace bullying are more likely to be male than female (De Cuyper, Baillien & De Witte, 2009; Hershcovis et al., 2007; Rayner, 1997). Hershcovis et al. (2007) also acknowledged that men may demonstrate more aggression, although Crothers, Lipinski and Minutolo (2009) countered that aggression is similarly common in women but played out with more subtlety.

Salin (2003) demonstrated that more often than not perpetrators hold posts where power is a feature. Hoel, Cooper & Faragher (2003) added that more often than not perpetrators hold posts where the element of formal power comes from a supervisory or managerial role. However, other research (Zapf et al., 2003) reported a less clear demarcation which was supported by Hoel and Giga's (2006) research where in almost 40% of incidents of workplace bullying the perpetrator had not been a manager. In a discussion paper, ACAS (2006) note that it is a fear of being the subject of a false allegation of bullying that can cause some managers to avoid dealing with issues of performance and/or capability. Management action which is legitimate is "fertile ground for false claims of bullying" (ACAS, 2006, p.9).

Managers are not immune to being bullied themselves and there is an increase in research considering upward bullying. Contrasting studies (Lewis & Sheehan, 2003; Zapf et al., 2003; Rayner & Cooper, 2003) cautioned that the presumption that managers and supervisors are the perpetrators is not necessarily Levels of upwards and horizontal (Lewis & Sheehan, 2003)

bullying are more prevalent than initially considered. Hoel and Giga (2006) noted that in 42% of allegations the perpetrator was peer and Branch et al. (2007b) identified that in nearly 1 in 4 cases the 'boss' was the target of upwards bullying. Wallace, Johnson and Trenberth (2010) investigated the prevalence of upward bullying and reported 70% of participants in an online survey had, within the previous six months, engaged in upwards bullying towards their supervisor. A definition of workplace bullying from Einarsen et al. (2011, p.22) notes:

Bullying at work means harassing, offending, or socially excluding someone or negatively affecting someone's work. In order for the label bullying (*or mobbing*) to be applied to a particular activity, interaction or process the bullying behaviour has to occur repeatedly and regularly (e.g., weekly) and over a period of time (e.g., about six months). Bullying is an escalating process in the course of which the person confronted ends up in an inferior position and becomes the target of systematic negative social acts. A conflict cannot be called bullying if the incident is an isolated event or if two parties of approximately equal strength are in conflict.

Although this definition offers specific clarity in terms of the repetition and frequency, the impact on the individual is more implicit. What is less clear is the label of 'strength' as this implies and reiterates what other definitions have said, in that there is a requirement for a power imbalance. This imbalance may often be considered as the target being dependent on the bully, usually in terms of line management within the workplace (Einarsen, et al. 2003; Keashly & Jagatic, 2003). Power differences are more than simply a person in authority or in a more senior position within a hierarchy. It is important to recognise that an imbalance in power may stem from having or being associated with a protected characteristic, having job/work experience, tacit knowledge about the organisation or work within it, employability opportunities from education or skills, as well as a more secure role, whether perceived or in reality (Jenkins, 2011).

Kelly (2007) argued that a bully does not necessarily exercise a power, or act in a way that results in control and authority with intent; noting that the 'accidental bully' is a concept which should not be overlooked; an accidental bully is one who is not aware of the impact of their actions, has a lower level of empathy, is consumed with work deadlines and targets and is less or even not aware of the effect their behaviour may have on others. Kelly (2007) also proposed the notion of the 'bossy bully', intent on getting things done and a necessary bossiness in order to be effective and efficient. Adams (1992) had said that a demarcation between bossy and bully would be clear, although the transition from bossy to bully would occur if professional insensitivity became clouded by a personal vindictiveness.

Perpetrators have been noted as having high levels of aggression and impulsiveness (Di Martino et al., 2000). Vartia (1996) posited that bullies are not self-aware of their traits, particularly ones which are likely to alienate them in a work or team environment such as greed, bitterness, jealousy and competitiveness. Baumeister et al. (1996) considered unstable self-esteem would lead to aggression when under threat and that this was a key underlying factor in a bully's make up. Ashforth (1994) noted that bullies were petty tyrants, abrasive and authoritarian, although this is not from research which involved the perpetrators; this entrenches and reinforces a stereotypical view that a bully is a caricature of evil malevolence. In reality, Arthur (2011) suggests the bullying behaviour is more likely to be one of subtle acts rather than the overt ones such an image conjures up. In addition maintaining such a stereotypical view is likely to make research with this group particularly difficult.

Studies are not clear on the impact of the age of a perpetrator. Barling, Dupre and Kelloway (2009) argue that with age comes an understanding of the consequences of negative behaviour and therefore it is more likely that an older worker will keep emotions or anger in check. De Cuyper et al. (2009) and Inness, Barling and Turner (2005) have reported that the opposite is the case, with (older) age being a dimension of the perpetrator's composition. Coyne et al. (2003) did not collect any demographic or biographical data from participants, acknowledging that to do so could reduce participation but were aware that such data could prove useful. In order to maintain the confidentiality and anonymity of research participants who have been (or who have been alleged to have been) perpetrators of workforce bullying there will need to be a sensitive and mindful approach to developing this area of research (Bjorkqvist et al., 1994).

Research which explored similarities between the bully and target have shown that bullies are more likely than not to have been the target of bullying which has in turn developed a focus on the constant and continuing personality traits which are similar to both bully and target. Lee and Brotheridge (2006) established that 83% of bullies were also victims and that 50% of victims who were also bullies. This significant link was developed by Linton and Power (2012) who measured characteristics of personality of both parties and, using the NAQ-R measured bullying and victimisation. Their bully/victim analysis found a substantive 41.7% of victims were also bullies and 89.7% of bullies were also victims (Linton & Power, 2012, p.741) and the personality traits of Machiavellianism, narcissism and psychoticism ranked highest predictors of engaging in the bullying of others, with Machiavellianism and psychoticism significant predictors of being a target. Eysenck & Eysenck (1994) linked the

characteristics of both groups with “anti-social behaviour, grandiosity, self-entitlement, manipulation, aggression, hostility, low empathy, interpersonal conflict and cruelty”. Linton and Power (2012, p.742) asserted the bully/victim identity should not be beyond the realms of imagination.

### **2.5.3 The organisational perspective**

In his blog, Serewicz (2012) discusses workplace bullying is not simply an interpersonal phenomena; it is contextualised in the culture and of organisations and the leadership model by which that organisation is managed. Einarsen (2000) noted that for workplace bullying to exist the organisation must condone it even if policy suggested otherwise. An organisation may have views that workplace bullying is undesirable but a feature nonetheless of a modern workplace. Lewis and Orford (2005) affirmed that where an organisation fails to identify and acknowledge bullying behaviour and then fails to react and manage it positively will not prevent recurrences and the problem is an organisational one.

The organisation’s culture plays a key part in the encouragement or discouragement of a bullying culture. Organisations without clear policies, processes and procedures for the training and development of staff in general, particularly in the issues of workplace bullying, equality and diversity are at risk of creating or allowing an environment which fails to appreciate the negative impact of bullying on organisational performance (CIPD, 2005, 2015a; Hoel & Cooper, 2000; Hoel et al., 2014). Pate and Beaumont (2010) established that 91% of organisations had a bullying or dignity at work policy, but noted that a policy in itself is not going to be instrumental in reducing or eradicating workplace bullying; it is the organisation’s commitment to the longer term reduction in grievances and higher levels of employee engagement which will demonstrate the effectiveness of the policy.

Organisational change, restructuring, down or right-sizing and other changes within teams such as new managers can also be triggers which can lead to bullying (Salin, 2003) and a workplace that is unsupportive and stressful will see an emergence of bullying, particularly if there is a lack of resources in a stressed workplace (Wheeler, Halbesleben and Shanine, 2010). These resources were defined by Hobfoll (1989, p.516) as “objects, personal characteristics, conditions or energies” which an individual values and requires to achieve in their work role and examples include financial security, employment stability, a job that matches their skills and talents, good working relationships with both managers and peers and a conducive working environment.



Staff concerns connected to organisational change and the ensuing uncertainty around their hours, status, pay and position have more recently been the focus of research as global economic crises increase the pace and the repetition of organisational change (Salin & Hoel, 2011). The organisation's culture, aims, objectives, strategies, technological and communication structures, organisational behaviour and design are all subject to considerable flux, making this the primary antecedent of bullying (Daft, 2007). Salin and Hoel (2011) caution though that whilst Daft's (2007) assertion is reasonable, the link between triggers of workplace bullying and organisational change are still to be explored thoroughly.

D'Cruz, Noronha and Beale (2014) postulate that organisational change resulting in redundancy (albeit they use the term 'lay-offs') constitutes bullying. Although the expectations of frequency and repetition are not satisfied, Zapf, Knorz and Kulla (1996) note the individual will be likely to experience stress and the negative act of redundancy itself can bring about perceptions of victimisation and trauma, sufficient to satisfy the expectation of intent by the perpetrator through unwelcome and abusive bullying behaviours (Einarsen, 2000).

Bullying may be more predominant in an organisation with an Ulrich (1997) HR model where a remote service centre deals with the majority of process and policy enquiries and an HR business partner who operates strategically with the business heads (Hoel & Giga, 2006; Guest & Woodrow, 2012). In devolving the remit for much HR management to supervisors and managers, organisations are ill-prepared for the interpersonal and softer skills required in effective people management (CBI, 2014; CIPD 2010; National Careers Service (n.d.)). CIPD (2015b) reported that a survey of 1500 workers by Family Lives reported 91% did not believe their organisations dealt well with bullying at work. Three in four respondents cited job insecurity as the reason they did not feel able to tackle the issue with their employer (CIPD, 2015b).

Hauge et al. (2009) pointed out that there are issues of contention within the work context which will lead to disagreement on at least a daily basis, one party or group are likely to find themselves in a more advantageous position than the other, but this is not to be considered bullying automatically, moreover it is part of the rich tapestry of daily working life. Examples which the researcher has investigated and managed included a claim that one person had been offered a job and the other had not, another time when one person was selected to do outreach work and another not. However, if an organisation is one where there is a real or

perceived lack of fairness, where there is conflict amongst teams, particularly in competitive environments and where workloads are continually at a high level then the culture is likely to be one where bullying is predominant (Einarsen, 1999; Hoel & Giga, 2006).

## ***2.6 The costs and consequences of workplace bullying***

The focus of research around the human and organisational costs of workplace bullying became prevalent in the mid-1990s with Hoel and Giga (2006) noting the phenomenon was significant in terms of impact on individuals involved, on individuals caught on the periphery, such as bystanders, witnesses or investigators and on organisations. In a comprehensive review of costs, Giga et al. (2008) noted that although there were issues and difficulties in categorically establishing costs resulting from or connected to workplace bullying it was, if rational and justified, appropriate to make an educated estimate. It is still pertinent to make every effort to determine costs and impact and in doing so Giga et al. (2008) created a template for a sound business case for the implementation of appropriate management and policy within organisations.

Giga et al. (2008) suggest that key costs can be summarised within a useful framework which identifies individual, organisational and societal, financial and personal impacts. These costs may have been underestimated as the human factors which apply to targets could probably also apply to the (alleged) perpetrator. For example, costs associated with managerial time and expertise, sick leave and medical costs may apply equally to the bully as they do the claimant; perhaps more so if the claim is vexatious, ill-intentioned or the claimant is over-sensitive (Heafield v Times Newspaper Ltd, 2013). Hansen et al. (2006) also notes that there are costs associated with downtime from working activity associated with workers who witness bullying; this may be in comforting or in meetings with others or in their own dis-engagement from the organisation as they consider leaving their employer (Rayner 2009).

The consequences and effect of workplace bullying on the target, witnesses, bystanders and on the organisation has been the subject of many research studies (Einarsen, 1999, 2000; Einarsen et al., 2003; Rayner, 1997, 2007, 2009; Zapf, 1999) although the consequences for the perpetrator has received little direct attention (Jenkins, 2011; Notelaers, 2014; Samnani & Singh, 2012). Some studies have suggested ways of managing bullies out of the organisation, (Tehrani, 2013) but research detailing the human consequences for targets does not seem to have been replicated for the perpetrator, alleged or proven.

The following sections review the impact in terms of both costs and consequences of workplace bullying from individual and organisational perspectives. The individual perspectives include not only the target and perpetrator, but witnesses, bystanders and family members of the target.

### **2.6.1 The individual cost and consequence perspective**

Hoel et al. (2001) note that a significant individual cost is the 'general reduction in quality of life', transpires through physical or mental ill-health progressing into absenteeism. Giga et al. (2008) note that many differentiating factors render individual costs estimations unreliable, suggesting that this is an area where research would be valuable. Individuals may have been absent from work through ill-health as a result of the bullying they have experienced and this may lead to a reduction in salary, bonus or other loss of income there may be medical expenses to pay, regardless of whether the care is private or state provided; car parking fees, prescription charges and unpaid time off for dependents who may attend appointments with their significant others may impact on individuals.

Since the inception of the employment tribunal fees for individuals in the UK in July 2013, the costs for an individual bringing a claim to the court is £250 when the claim is submitted and a further £950 if/when the case progresses to a hearing (HM Courts & Tribunals Service, 2013, pp.4-6). These figures are based on "Type B" claim (see HMCTS T435, 2013) as there is no specific legislation to deal with workplace bullying, the claim would be pursued on this basis. Type B claims are not straight forward (in the view of the House of Commons, 2015), but are difficult and complex issues which claimants ask the employment tribunal to determine, which results in the higher of the two types of fees being applicable. As claims of discrimination fall into this category, it is likely that claims of workplace bullying whether as a standalone contractual issue or linked to harassment are Type B claims.

Workplace bullying can demoralise and destabilise the most competent and confident workers; the consequences are wide reaching and it is accepted that those who have been bullied are able to vividly recall the incidents and experiences (Townend, 2008). There are substantial numbers of studies which report the ill-health related effects of bullying: Bjorkqvist et al. (1994) noted that sleeplessness, low mood, lethargy and a lack of concentration developed into a social anxiety disorder, Leymann (1996) reported nausea, loss of appetite and gastric upset, Notelaers et al. (2006) and Hansen et al. (2006) reviewed the impact of insomnia and noted heightened levels of anxiety. Quine (2001) undertook a study

in the UK which noted how bullied workers were more likely to report clinical depression and job related stress than non-bullied counterparts.

The Health and Occupation Research (THOR) is an 'observatory' monitoring medically certificated sickness absence in the UK. Comprising specialist physicians and general practitioners (GPs) the network collates data on "incidence and trends of work-related ill health" (THOR On-line, 2015). In 2013 THOR provided data that reported 10% of people on sick leave with mental ill-health was as a result of bullying and that this amounted to 8055 days of sickness absence over the six year period 2006 to 2012. In drilling down into the data sets, THOR extrapolated one in three absences was recognised as resulting from stressors found at the workplace. Although a substantial stressor factor was generically titled, 'workplace factors', it accounted for 35% of all mental ill-health absence with a further 24% of absence relating to interpersonal relationships at work. The significance of the interpersonal relationships was such that the data was further analysed and of this, 41% was specifically ascribed to bullying and harassment. 35% to interpersonal difficulties with manager/management and 14% to interpersonal difficulties with colleagues (THOR, 2013). What appears to be an underlying concern in these figures is a demonstration that bullying results in absence from work, these absences are longer than other symptoms or illness may cause. Relationships with managers, colleagues, team members, service users, customers, clients plays an important role in levels of stress and health of workers as well as influencing organisational performance.

Since relatively early research (Rayner, 2007) a clear link has been established that workplace bullying is increasingly cited as a major cause of occupational stress. Quine (2001) notes this is likely to result in elevated levels of depression and anxiety. Matthiesen & Einarsen (2004) established the link between bullying and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Lutgen-Sandvik et al. (2007) and Zapf et al. (1996) established that being ostracised from the workplace resulting in social isolation can result in both mental ill-health and the development of 'maladaptive' coping mechanisms (Rospenda, Richman & Shannon, 2009).

The UK Government's Office of National Statistics reported stress, anxiety and depression resulted in the loss of 15 million working days in the UK in 2013 (ONS, 2014), almost 50% of the total working days lost. The impact of workplace bullying on individual's mental health has therefore considered significant for some time (McAvoy & Murtagh, 2003). The British Medical Journal discussed an "alarming" increase in the high prevalence of sufferers of stress

admitting to being casualties of bullying in the workplace (McAvoy & Murtagh, 2003, p.776) and that the modern combination of economic rationalisation, increasing competition, downsizing and tough, target driven 'macho' management styles have created a "toxic workplace" and "deadly culture" (McAvoy & Murtagh, 2003, p.776). Earnshaw and Cooper (2000) recognised the impact of stress on physical and mental health and well-being, noting that it was linked to ailments and conditions ranging from hypertension, coronary thrombosis, allergies, gastric ulcers, diabetes, to depression, stress, anxiety, PTSD (Leyman & Gustafsson, 1996; Mikkelsen & Einarsen, 2002; Schneider, Swan & Fitzgerald, 1997) and alcoholism (Rospenda et al., 2009). Matthiesen and Einarsen (2004) consider that if the bullying experience threatens life as the target understands it, then although not potentially fatal, it is sufficient to corrupt the person's fundamental beliefs in justice and equity which can negatively influence their personality to such an extent it leads to PTSD (Janoff-Bulman, 1992).

Acknowledging that there are other reasons, including underlying medical conditions, for illness and disease, it is noted that many definitions explore the link between bullying and stress. The trade union Amicus (2007) noted that bullying may cause stress, the Andrea Adams Trust (1997) added anxiety, emotional distress or mental illness and CIPD (2005) defined bullying as causing psychological distress. The British Medical Journal reiterated this with their definition of bullying as being "persistent, offensive, abusive, intimidating, malicious or insulting behaviour; abuse of power or unfair penal sanction. These make the recipient feel upset, humiliated, vulnerable and threatened and caused them to suffer stress" (McAvoy and Murtagh, 2003, p.776).

In particular, the link to stress is of concern; the British Heart Foundation calculates that in the UK there is one coronary thrombosis every three minutes, totalling 175,000 deaths annually (BHF, 2015). The UK mental health charity MIND estimates that one in five workers have taken sick leave as a result of stress but 90% of these did not admit to stress being the reason to their employer, preferring instead to give a different reason for their absence (MIND, 2013). MIND also estimate that 30 to 40% of all sickness absence from the workplace is attributed to mental and emotional disturbance (MIND, 2013).

Research into the effects and consequences of workplace bullying on targets offers evidence to support the causal links between stress and bullying (McAvoy & Murtagh, 2003); there are negative effects of being bullied (Rayner, 2007) and those negative effects result in stress

(Earnshaw & Cooper, 2000; McAvoy & Murtagh, 2003), but it is important to consider whether this holds true in all instances. Workers with a specific mental illness may provoke workplace bullying as they defy conventions, infuriate or frustrate co-workers (Felsen, 1992). Coyne et al. (2000) noted how one person's specific characteristics may predispose them to being bullied with Kivimäki, Virtanen, Vartiainen, Elovainio and Keitikangas-Järvinen (2003) noting that poor health as a result of being bullied is liable to increase the person's vulnerability to further bullying, in an ever decreasing cycle. Nielsen, Hetland, Matthiesen & Einarsen (2012) similarly noted the cyclical impact, but with a focus that being subject to workplace bullying is a "significant predictor for subsequent mental health problems with mental health also being a predictor for later exposure to bullying." De Lange, Taris, Komier, Houtman & Bongers (2005) noted also that an anxious or depressed worker would be less likely to consider a self-report of their organisation, role or job positively and that they had a 'gloomier perception mechanism'.

Hogh, Mikkelsen and Hansen (2011) consider how bullying does not limit itself to affecting targets and the respected text notes that the adverse effects of bullying at work are not limited to targets but includes observers, bystanders and organisations. Colleagues, work mates, family and friends have also been negatively affected by the impact of workplace bullying (Duffy & Sperry, 2007; Einarsen, 1999). What is missing from the discussion are the consequences, effects or impact on the other essential party, that of the bully themselves.

Bystanders and witnesses, who although not bullied themselves, report significant levels of mental ill-health and increased levels of stress compared to workers in organisations considered 'bully-free' (Vartiainen, 2001) and report more anxiety (Hansen et al. 2006). Tehrani (2003, 2004) noted that colleagues who are observers of bullying can be as badly affected or damaged as those being bullied; their worries stem from a sense of guilt that they are not helping the victim and also from fear that they may be next in line for the same treatment.

Cox and Paley (1997) suggested the linking of how what is happening to one member of the family can directly impact on others and this was developed when Hannabus (1998) and Townend (2008) established that targets of workplace bullying become socially isolated and withdrawn which results in a tension between them and their significant others, resulting in disruptions to home life and affecting friends or family. Hoobler and Brass (2006) expressed concern that a target of workplace bullying is likely to go home, 'kick the dog' and be a bully there.

## **2.6.2 The organisational cost and consequence perspective**

Leymann's (1990) seminal research suggested that the cost of workplace bullying to the United States of America could range from \$30,000 to as much as \$100,000 per year, per target. In the UK, Giga et al. (2008) estimated the total costs of workplace bullying to be £13.75 billion. Lutgen-Sandvik (2003) and Giga et al. (2008) systematically categorised the costs into the discrete tranches of individual, organisational and wider societal costs. This was helpful in demonstrating the impact of workplace bullying on organisations and how profit and business performance could be negatively affected by it. Organisational costs will all, at some point, impact on the bottom line (Lutgen-Sandvik, 2003) and although not all are financially explicit or tangible (Giga et al., 2008) have the ability to impact negatively on the triple bottom line of people, profit and planet and/or 'employer of choice' branding.

Workplaces where bullying is not tackled can develop a 'strategic short-sightedness' (Harvey, Heames, Richey & Leonard, 2006) where it could be difficult to efficiently and effectively implement organisational change due to an inflexible, uncommitted and less than loyal workforce. This in turn impacts on the organisation's ability to deliver good customer service through reduced performance and productivity. Rayner (2007) suggested a 26.5% reduction in motivation in workplaces where bullying was prevalent, supporting Hoel and Cooper's (2000) research that established a reduction in discretionary effort and commitment occurred when worker stress levels increased.

Giga et al. (2008) estimated that lost or unproductive time could account for a 1.5% reduction in overall UK gross domestic productivity, which equated to an estimated negative impact of £17.65 billion in 2007; in 2013 this was calculated at a loss of 131 million working days (ONS, 2014). It should be acknowledged that these figures may not all be the result of workplace bullying, but they are in themselves significant and worthy of note.

Time is also consumed with HR and management intervention; dealing with grievances, ill-health, performance measuring and monitoring and in the recruitment and selection of new staff. The 'real cost of recruitment', following significant efforts to reduce spend is estimated at £1,500 per hire (Xpert HR, 2012), with additional costs in the induction, training and loss of tacit knowledge as new staff replace leavers. Rayner (2009) estimated 34% of targets of workplace bullying consider leaving their employer and almost two thirds of witnesses also consider leaving. Vartia (1996) had noted that 46% of targets will consider leaving but in

both cases, the evidence that these identified workers do actually leave is not yet established (Hoel, Einarsen & Cooper, 2003). The UK recession and organisational change which resulted from wider global financial crises may also influence the intentions and actions of the identified 'likely leavers'.

The financial impact on an organisation's reputational risk is difficult to quantify; however awards such as Investors in People (2014), Stonewall's Diversity Champions (2015) and Great Place to Work recognition (2015) are considered to be demonstration of the value the organisation places upon staff as an asset. Such recognition is not awarded to organisations where a culture of workplace bullying (and accepted, other factors) is prevalent and unaddressed, however this may be seen to fall outside the remit or assessment capacity of the schemes.

Social media now plays an important and strategic part in the brand and image of an organisation (Rokka, Karlsson & Tienari, 2013). Glassdoor, an online social media platform allows the prospective, current and former employees of organisations to share their views, opinions (be they positive or negative). For example, the University of Huddersfield page notes a current professor's opinion that the university is "moving forward AND nice" (Glassdoor, 2014), whilst views on Kirklees Council note "Full of endless bureaucracy and well-meaning but ineffective staff" (Glassdoor, 2013). The site goes on to note the recruitment processes for institutions and any disgruntled worker can be seen to make their opinion known. This reputational damage has not yet been extrapolated into costs, however Hoel et al. (2001) argued that employers are galvanised into action by threats to organisational ability that stem from reputational damage.

Medical related costs are wider than the costs of absence leave payments; a worker who is on sick leave may require a replacement and this may involve hiring extra staff or payment of overtime to others (Gordon & Risley, 1999; Hoel et al., 2001). Medical related absences can lead to ill health or early retirement which brings about increased costs relating to the employer's insurance or employee assistance programme. Giga et al. (2008) assessed the costs of bullying related absence to be £199 million which was a significantly reduced estimate against the earlier Confederation of British Industry (CBI, 2000) estimate of £10.5 billion.

Costs for the rehabilitation of workers do not seem to have been extrapolated yet, but the employment tribunal is able to order the reinstatement or re-engagement of a former



employee and it would be an expected requirement that the organisation make provision for an effective and supportive rehabilitation, else fear a further claim of victimisation (*Barlow v Ranc Care Homes Ltd*; *Mehanger v Map Group UK Ltd*).

In essence, workplace bullying affects everyone; targets, perpetrators, bystanders, witnesses, clients, customers and the organisation itself. Motivation of workers begins to drop and loyalty is lost. Care over the end product of work declines, workers do not want to be at work and exit, mentally or physically and ultimately the organisation cannot function. Repeated or continual experience of workplace bullying has adverse and detrimental impacts on individuals, not just those who are subject to it, but witnesses, bystanders and the perpetrators, but it is the consequences for the organisation which are possible the widest ranging and negative (Aquino & Thau, 2009; Bowling & Beehr, 2006).

## ***2.7 The UK legal position***

Historically, the issue of a legal definition and separate legal remedy for workplace bullying has not been progressed; currently UK law has no specific legislation in place to deal directly with workplace bullying. Whilst other European Community members including France, Belgium and Sweden have adopted policies for handling bullying cases, the UK Government believes the current general legislation and other legal remedies already in place provide sufficient protection (Di Martino, Hoel & Cooper, 2003). Walden and Hoel (2004) asserted that UK law fails to recognise bullying as a central issue, a stance which reinforces the perception of many that workplace bullying is a discreet problem, not the real and serious issue which some say is insidious throughout working society (Namie & Namie, 2003).

The Dignity at Work Bill was drawn up by the Manufacturing, Science and Finance Trade Union which was presented by Lord Monkswell to the House of Lords in the winter session of 1996. Prior to progression to the House of Commons, where enactment could be confirmed, the Bill was obstructed by the then ruling Conservative Government. After the next election, under the incoming Labour Government, the Bill was placed on a permanent hold until it was remitted to the House of Lords again in the 2001 winter session, under the direction of Baroness Gibson. The Bill has not progressed from this point and there remains no legislation in the UK which deals specifically with the issue of workplace bullying although workers can bring claims under other legislation with the Equality Act 2010 expected to be the most frequently relied on (Eversheds LLP, 2011).

Chapter 2, Section 26 of the Act defines harassment as:

A person (A) harasses another (B) if:

(a) A engages in unwanted conduct related to a relevant protected characteristic  
and

(b) The conduct has the purpose or effect of:

- i. Violating B's dignity, or
- ii. Creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for B.

The UK Employment Tribunal service now considers claims brought by workers for harassment and discrimination under the Equality Act 2010 which aimed to consolidate and simplify 600 pieces of legislation and to expand the existing discrimination law when it was enshrined in UK law in October of that year. The Act now aims to prevent discrimination and harassment relating to the following 'protected characteristics' which are presented in the order they appear in the Act (c1, s5):

- Age,
- Disability,
- Gender reassignment,
- Marriage and civil partnership,
- Pregnancy and maternity,
- Race,
- Religion or belief,
- Sex,
- Sexual orientation.

The Act sets out the definition of harassment, which workers can rely on should they progress a claim for which the burden of proof lies on the claimant and the Act is specific in placing this responsibility:

If there are facts from which a tribunal could decide, in the absence of any other explanation, that person A contravened a provision of the Act, the tribunal must hold that the contravention occurred. This does not apply if A shows that A did not contravene the provision. (The Equality Act 2010, c5, s136).

Initially, the Act made provision under which employers could be considered liable for the actions of a third party (perhaps a customer, supplier, contractor, patient, pupil, visitor, etc.) should they harass the worker. Had the employer failed to take reasonably practicable steps to prevent a third party from harassing its workers, or to know of harassment of a worker and fail to act, then they could be liable under the Act. Despite consultation, which showed

71% positive support for the provision, the Conservative Government abolished this third party harassment provision on 1 October 2013 in a review of what it considered to be 'unnecessary regulation' (CIPD, 2013).

The Equality Act 2010 however makes provisions only for a worker to bring a complaint if the workplace bullying was brought about by harassment due to the virtue of a protected characteristic. If there is no protected characteristic upon which to rely, a claim for bullying in itself could not be brought. In reality a claim of workplace bullying, similarly to a claim of third party harassment there are other legal remedies, to seek redress. Most notably, these include: breach of contract; resignation from employment and bring a claim for breach of trust and confidence which led to unfair constructive dismissal; health & safety legislation; the Protection from Harassment Act 1997; or a personal injury claim.

Recently, use of the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 and the Public Interest Disclosure (Prescribed Persons) Order 2014, perhaps better known as 'whistle-blowing' has been used by workers to report wrongdoing in connection with the business or dealings of their employing organisation. In 'making a disclosure in the public interest' either to their employer or a prescribed person or body, health and safety concerns (Parkins v Sodexho), dangerous conditions and overcrowding in NHS wards (Mattu v University Hospitals of Coventry and Warwickshire NHS Trust) and a bogus assault charge levied at a prisoner in a Category A prison (Lingard v HM Prison Service) have been successful. In each of these cases the claimants expressed concerns of workplace bullying during their employment and as a result of their whistle-blowing; this associates with Bjorkelo's (2013) assertions that whistle-blowers are twice as likely to raise issues of workplace bullying as non-whistle-blowing workers. Bjorkelo, Ryberg, Matthiesen and Einarsen, (2008) demonstrated the link between whistle-blowing and resulting workplace bullying, where reports of negative acts are retaliatory, particularly ostracism and selective downsizing (Near & Miceli, 1986). Although the Public Interest Disclosure Act and later Orders make provision for the dismissal of a whistle-blower an unfair one, it was the bullying that manifested in disciplinary action being taken against Carol Lingard which resulted in an order of costs being made against HM Prison Service and a compensation award of £477,000.

Using the duty of care responsibility of her employer and the Protection from Harassment Act 1997 to resolve and remedy the workplace bullying she experienced, Helen Green (Green v DB Group Services (UK) Limited, 2006) successfully argued that the "relentless campaign of

mean and spiteful behaviour” of five colleagues had been domineering, disrespectful, dismissive and confrontational and been purposefully intent on belittling and undermining her in front of others. Mr Justice Clancy determined that the employer had failed to take reasonable and adequate measures to prevent Green from the bullying of her co-workers and that the High Court found commercial bank DB Group Services in breach of the duty of care it should have afforded her. Had DB Group acted as a judicious and responsible employer they would not have allowed the repeated bullying to have continued; instead, despite being aware of the bullying, they simply ignored what was happening. Despite his Honour noting that in light of her attempts to seek another career she would feasibly be back to work within the next five years, the result, in brief considered Mrs Green’s health, safety, well-being and future career and awarded damages to Mrs Green which amounted to a not insubstantial £852,000. DB Group Services would not only have this cost to pay but there are other issues of damage to reputational risk, litigation costs and more to address.

In the UK employment law tribunals and within the confines of the Equality Act 2010, bullying behaviour must be linked with a discrimination claim and therefore be predicated on one or more of the protected characteristic(s). In a major study concerning the protected characteristic of sexual orientation and workplace bullying, Hoel et al. (2014) established “beyond doubt that bullying and discrimination is a common experience for many lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) employees” (Hoel, 2014). The research established that LGBs were more than two times more likely to be subject of bullying and discrimination than their heterosexual colleagues; this increased to one in three for lesbian and bisexual women. The study also established that having a disability, a long term health condition such as a psychological or emotional problem, or being under 25 also increased the likelihood of being bullied. Key in this study was the research done with the colleagues, HR leaders and trade union representatives, which portrayed a lack of both policy and diversity awareness; Lewis noted the findings had been “truly shocking” and that despite many British workplaces establishing equality strategies, “much more work needs to be done” (Lewis, 2014).

Okechukwu, Souza, Davis & Butch de Castro’s (2013) research complimented the Hoel et al. findings, with similar concerns that minority groups are “more likely to be victims of workplace injustice and suffer more adverse outcomes” (Okechukwu et al., 2013, p.573) and notes that there are emerging patterns of age being a potential trigger for workplace injustices; in the UK with an aging work population and widespread removal of a default retirement age this may make pertinent research in due course.

## **2.8 HR Policies**

Human resource practices embedded in organisations are intended to enhance performance (Huselid, 1995; Barney & Wright, 1998) and improve worker well-being (Davis & Cherns, 1975) often through a suite of policies which have the potential to positively impact on work-life balance (Guest, 2002) and enrich the quality of working life. Huselid's (1995) study considered a link between a comprehensive and plentiful range of HR policies and better organisational performance; confirmatory research by Boselie, Dietz and Boon, (2005) and Combs, Lui, Hall and Ketch (2006), further establishing the link and the positive impact on profit and reduction in labour turnover a range of HR policies and processes could produce. Keenoy (1990) and Legge (2007) were critical of HR high performance policies and practices which sought to deliver results and heighten organisational performance as being manipulative and unethical by virtue of not having the worker in mind. Nishii, Lepak and Schneider (2008) established that improved organisational performance was achievable through policies and processes which focused on worker well-being and in doing so, righted the ethical imbalance the more high performance policies had skewed. In addressing any ethical imbalance in terms of a purposeful design of HR policies simply to maximise high performance, Guest and Woodrow (2012) note HR was less concerned with the well-being of workers and more concerned with the resource based views of competitive advantage (Barney, 1991; Barney & Wright, 1998). HR policies designed to manage absence or attendance are structured in a way that organisations consider them both supportive and fair, whilst Liefoghe and Mackenzie-Davey's (2001) research evidenced that workers regarded sickness management policies as bullying.

It is perhaps not the amount of HR policies and/or practices which should be the yard stick by which an HR function is measured. Harley, Allen and Sargent (2007) noted that increasing levels of stress are also prevalent where more HR practices are embedded. Guest & Woodrow (2012) posit this may be brought about by the responsibility of greater autonomy which could bring both satisfaction and stress.

Peccei, van de Voorde and van Veldhoven (2013) note that it is in the application of HR processes that the benefits of greater results, better well-being and worker happiness can be gained. The mere presence of an HR principle is not sufficient to bring about any benefits, rather it is the introduction, quality, implementation and "practice on the ground" (Guest & Woodrow, 2012, p.114) which determines its success.

## **2.8.1 Bullying policy and procedure**

Organisations frequently demonstrate their intent and procedures for managing bullying at work with an anti-bullying or dignity at work policy; CIPD (2007a) noted 83% of UK organisations had a policy on bullying/harassment in place. Rayner and Lewis (2011, p.327) note that policies which deal with bullying have dual purpose; the policy is a “guiding statement”, detailing not only how bullying will be dealt with but also detailing how it will be prevented.

An anti-bullying policy should be agreed with the trade union or worker representatives, communicated through multiple channels and include (CIPD, 2015a):

- examples of what constitutes bullying behaviour including cyber-bullying, work-related events and harassment by third parties
- an explanation of the damaging effects and why it will not be tolerated
- a statement that bullying will be treated as a disciplinary offence
- clarification of the legal implications and outline the costs associated with personal liability
- details of how to get help and make a complaint
- a promise that allegations will be treated speedily, seriously and confidentially and prevent victimisation
- details of parties who have a role in the policy and process; accountability of HR, managers and the role of union or employee representatives
- a requirement that supervisors/managers will implement policy and ensure it is understood
- an emphasis that every employee carries responsibility for their behaviour

Procedurally, organisations use the policy document to explain how complaints under the policy are effected. CIPD’s HRinform (2013) suggest good practice is to offer more than one reporting option, so that there is recourse to the policy for someone who feels (for example) they do not wish to raise the issue with their manager. Having raised the issue through an appropriate channel, an independent manager is appointed to undertake an investigation (CIPD HRinform, 2013). The next stages in the process will depend on the findings of the investigation, but usually include options for mediation and recourse to the disciplinary policy should a claim be upheld or considered false. (CIPD’s HR-inform, 2013).

Claims of workplace bullying are often presented to HR (CIPD, 2005, 2015a); this seems logical and appropriate given the remit of the function but perhaps moreover as line managers are often considered to be part of the problem (Hoel et al., 2001; Salin, 2003). Managers are considered more likely to avoid taking actions (Beale & Hoel, 2011) and if a ‘bang both

their heads together' approach is adopted, are unlikely to make matters any better. Targets making contact with the HR function are likely to do so at a time when they are emotional, upset and/or distressed. HR will then often meet with the target in the first instance, acknowledge that the target is upset and as a result, support mechanisms are put into place. Support can come from personal and social sources as well as organisational ones (D'Cruz & Noronha, 2010).

McGregor (2015, p.181) summarises research in work with UK public and private employers and notes that organisational support mechanisms extended to claimants can include:

- An organizational mentor
- Counselling/listening support
- Occupational health or Employee Assistance Programme
- Dignity at work advisor/workplace support colleague
- Mediation
- Workplace friend – letter writing, meeting attendance
- Options around working location, hours, duties, line management or job responsibilities

In guidance on policy design, CIPD (2013) note organisations should provide support throughout the process and counselling to complainants. This same guidance does not afford the same to the alleged bully but recommends awareness training and consideration of suspension as a result of the claimant's preferred resolution method.

Whilst the investigation is underway, Namie (2007, p.48) suggests the organisation must "treat the bullied target/complainant as credible until proven otherwise." There should be however, a difference between Namie's (2007) 'credible' and an acceptance that the categorical, single version of the 'truth' and the facts of the matter from the target's perspective is the only one in existence. The time taken in investigations to prepare, undertake and conclude can be lengthy (McGregor, 2015). D'Cruz and Noronha (2010) caution that poor complaint handling compounds and exacerbates negative outcomes for targets but this could equally extend to an (alleged) bully, bystanders, witnesses, customers, clients and the organisation itself. During this time there is a likelihood that informal or mediated resolution rapidly diminishes (Keashly & Nowell, 2003) and as a result, the investigator has to determine who is 'right' and who is 'wrong'. Jenkins (2013, p.5) explains "one party [is] trying to prove they were bullied and the other party denying or justifying their behaviour".

Crucially, what is of concern is that it cannot necessarily be the case that the first of the two parties to report allegations of workplace bullying is the 'victim' and the other party therefore automatically the 'bully' (Jenkins et al., 2012). Tehrani (2003) adds that the behaviour towards each other, regardless of who is the (alleged) bully and who is the (alleged) target can be inappropriate on both sides. Telling the difference between which party is which can be difficult as the parties both engage in bullying behaviour (Tehrani, 2003).

Small, Lowenstein and Slovic (2007) discussed 'Identifiable Victim Effect' (Hamilton & Sherman, 1996), noting that empathy is given to a person who becomes more distinguishable for having suffered more than other anonymous people. In relation to workplace bullying, parallel links are possible; the complainant presents themselves as the 'victim' and is then labelled and treated as such. The bond between the HR and/or the investigation manager with the claimant may be strengthened as they (subconsciously) react to the suffering and struggle the claimant describes (Small et al., 2007). HR and/or investigation managers may then become more engaged, both emotionally and mentally as the claimant describes their experience; at that point, the (alleged) bully is an unknown person and therefore receiving less engagement or support (Hamilton & Sherman, 1996; Sherman, Beike & Ryalls, 1999). There is then potential that the claimant (perhaps unconsciously) is treated as an identified victim and receives "greater cognitive attention and deeper consideration" than the (alleged) bully (Small & Loewenstein, 2003).

## **2.9 Mediation**

Mediation is an accepted alternate dispute resolution method (ACAS, 2008, 2012; CIPD, 2011; Ridley-Duff & Bennett, 2011; Roche & Teague, 2012) although a definition is, as with one for bullying, problematic. The range of definitions spans from mediation being a chat with two people and another, to a highly structured process (Latreille, 2010; Saundry & Wibberley, 2012). A definition from Ridley-Duff and Bennett (2011, p.123) offers a more comprehensive overview "a confidential and voluntary process in which a neutral person helps people in a dispute to explore and understand their differences so that they can find their own solution".

Although writers agree about the use of mediation there is debate about its timing. ACAS (2009, 2013) suggest that mediation is most effective if used at an early juncture to resolve workplace disputes and that this could be as either a precursor or alternate to a formal resolution method. Gibbons (2007) also regarded mediation as a technique to bring about



an early resolution, recommending that in the UK it should be considered as a requirement prior to a claim being submitted to the Employment Tribunal. Ridley-Duff and Bennett (2011) acknowledge this but consider mediation equally viable at any point in an escalating conflict situation. Keashly and Nowell (2003) are less certain and express concern that mediation is not suitable at the point where conflict is so entrenched that there are threats which would breach (gross) misconduct criteria or are violent in nature. Having said that though, Keashly and Nowell (2003) suggest that mediation may be valuable in setting 'ground rules' around the development of an agreement for a working relationship between two parties after the investigatory and disciplinary processes conclude, regardless of innocence or guilt on the part of the accused. However, at this point there is likely to be a 'winner' and a 'loser', which ACAS (2013) express doubt and concern over a likely successful outcome given that the organisation's policy and process may have determined outcomes and actions already.

It seems therefore that mediation is an option at any point in the dispute matter, with an emphasis that sooner has potential to be better for individuals and organisations alike. ACAS (2013) caution that mediation is not a 'first resort', rather that individuals should, wherever possible, make an effort to engage in dialogue with the other party and/or their line manager and make an attempt at resolution together. Mediation can however, act as an enabler of better/closer working relationships although it is recognised that the parties' individual and personal dispositions towards this are key to any success (Tjosvold, Poon & Yu, (2005) and is therefore worthy of consideration in managing workplace conflict and allegations of bullying.

## ***2.10 Caricaturing workplace bullies***

There has been a considerable amount written on bullying and bullies which has resulted in a series of 'self-help' books and guidance. Some, from a professional body (CIPD, 2005, 2015a) and organisational representative groups (ACAS, 2010; BIS, 2011) offers supportive advice in a moderated tone. Other work has brought about a rise in caricaturing and creating typologies of bullies in order to alert its reader to the extent of the issue (Babiak & Hare, 2007; Field, 1996; Namie, 2007). This sensationalising seems to match the developing definitions discussed earlier. The Unite (2012) definition in particular portrays the bully in a more and more sensational and stereotypical tone with examples and illustrations of bullying behaviour which are often stark and shocking. The labels or typologies given to bullies are particularly negative, whilst the victim is dealt with in a more positive and supportive way. Martin (2000) notes that this is really to be expected, as authors seek to generate awareness

and a “dramatic story” (Martin, 2000, p.401) will better illustrate their point and as a result be more recognisable and therefore reportable.

Sutton (2007) describes bullies as “assholes”, Clarke (2008) discussed how one could identify and then protect oneself from a bully who is the workplace psychopath and Babiak and Hare (2007) noted that psychopaths at work are snakes in corporate dress. Field (1996) offered a 15 step process to unmask a bully giving advice on how each different caricature could be best managed. In a review of Field’s (1996) *Bully in Sight* by Field, Martin (2000, p.401) notes that the book makes over-generalised, sweeping statements which offer little support to academic work, rather it “reads as an angry and negative personal testament”.

CIPD’s membership periodical, *People Management* (2013), added to the typologies with #1 The Snake, #2 The Old-School Bully, #3 The Underminer and #4 The Critic. This article then encourages readers to undertake a self-diagnostic quiz with answers which either force the results to be a workplace bully to a lesser or greater extent or “an angel” (*People Management*, 2013, p.29-30).

Given the experiences and the concerns important to the participants in the study, it may be appropriate to consider whether these caricatures and the dramatisation of bullies and bullying has resulted in over use of making allegations when, in reality, it is more likely that there is an organisational or performance management issue to resolve. Waldock (in *People Management*, 2013) reports that in an organisation of 10,000 plus staff she accepts there will be instances of bullying, but that is not “bullying for the sake of bullying” (Waldock, 2013, p.27, cited in *People Management*, 2013).

Namie (2007), similarly deals with targets in a positive vein and the bully in a negative one. Targets are the ideal employee and it is their traits of being highly emotionally intelligent, motivated, reliable and knowledgeable, being popular with colleagues and being known for their honest values and work ethics that they are bullied. “Targets are nice people” (Namie, 2007, p.45). Bullies on the other hand are cruel, controlling and volatile acting only in their own interests; “All bullies are Machiavellian and use others to advance their careers” (Namie, 2007, p.45). The possibility of all bullies being Machiavellian or having psychopathic personalities must be questioned; Caponecchia and Wyatt (2007) demonstrated that this is statistically very unlikely.

## **2.11 Chapter synopsis**

This chapter reviewed extant literature to discuss the key contributions which resonate with the emerging grounded theory *guilty until proven innocent*. The traditional arrangement of the thesis is followed in order to deliver a professional presentation, however the literature review was undertaken in accord with the tenets of a classical grounded theory approach, (Glaser, 1978, 1992; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). That is, the literature was reviewed after the data collection and as analysis of the findings presented emerging concepts and categories. The benefits of this are useful in reviewing literature which is within the focus of the participants' concerns. This has revealed similarities between concerns of (alleged) bullies and witnesses, bystanders and targets.

The literature review chapter considered the development of definitions of workplace bullying and to whom these are accessible and recognised. The expectation that a clear and consistent definition of what workplace bullying is, may indeed remain elusive as different interested parties have different intentions. Whilst academic researchers seek to ensure there is a consistency to give a reliable foundation for results and recommendations, workplace representative groups offer more sensationalised or liberal definitions in order to demonstrate bullying behaviours. Similarly, the characteristics of the target/claimant and (alleged) bully are ones which definitions may not take a helpful approach to in terms of furthering research.

Despite research into experiences and consequences of being accused of being a workplace bully being limited, there are growing concerns around the behaviour of claimants and that the line between 'bully' and 'victim' may become more and more blurred. Measures such as HR structure and policy, antecedents, costs and mediation as a remedy are critically examined as these related to participants' concerns that these had impact on the organisations, themselves and how they were negatively perceived from the outset.

The following chapter discusses and critically analyses the research methodology and methods for employed in this study. In considering the philosophical underpinnings, grounded theory as a methodology and procedural approaches the chapter explains how the research aims and objectives will be addressed.

# Chapter 3: Research methodology

## 3.1 Chapter overview

This chapter discusses the methodology used in the research in a series of six sections. The first section considers how the research aims and objectives fit into the setting of the research, which were the participants' workplaces. Section two discusses the study's research philosophy, ontology, epistemology and methodology followed by Section three which progresses the discussion around classical grounded theory (Glaser, 1978, 1992; Glaser & Strauss, 1967) as a methodology in terms of origin, approach and the development from original work to later divergence and versions. In discussing this, the application of the methodology for this study is charted and justified in a review of the challenges and benefits of the grounded theory approach. Section four focuses on the sampling strategy, initial interaction, engagement and recruitment of participants and their contribution through unstructured interviews. In Section five a review of the ethical considerations undertaken in order to safeguard the participants and the securing of ethical approval is reviewed. In the final section, Section six, the data collection methods, rationale for the motif 'all is data' are discussed. A brief synopsis then finishes this chapter.

## 3.2 The research aims and objectives – Section 1

Aim: The purpose of this research is to critically evaluate the lived experience and organisational implications of being accused of being a workplace bully, from the perspective of the (alleged) perpetrator.

The research objectives were:

- Objective 1: To critically evaluate previous studies of adult workplace bullying with a focus on the (alleged) bully's perspective;
- Objective 2: To analyse the experience and/or impact of being accused of being a workplace bully; to listen to the accused's own story;
- Objective 3: To critically evaluate the accused's perception of their organisation's support mechanisms offered to them during the whole course of the procedure and beyond;
- Objective 4: To develop a grounded theory which explains these perceptions and the concerns of being accused of being a workplace bully;
- Objective 5: To contribute to the body of academic and operational practice when dealing with issues of workplace bullying.

### **3.2.1 The research setting**

Given the research aim of critically evaluating the lived experience and organisational implications of being accused of being a workplace bully from the perspective of the (alleged) perpetrator, the primary settings for the research were the workplaces of participants. Although all participants worked in different sectors, industries and roles, the common theme was that they were all accused of being a bully within their workplace setting. Table 3 (page 95) notes the details for each participant. It is the different setting with repeated similar participant experience which made for an ideal opportunity to ensure constant comparison (Glaser, 1992, 1998; Glaser & Straus 1967; Gibson & Hartman, 2014) developed the emergence of the grounded theory. Such settings offer an environment where research into the interaction between work colleagues, their views on the reality, their beliefs and the movement of these from their opinion to a reality which impacts on those around them (Burns & Grove, 2005) is possible.

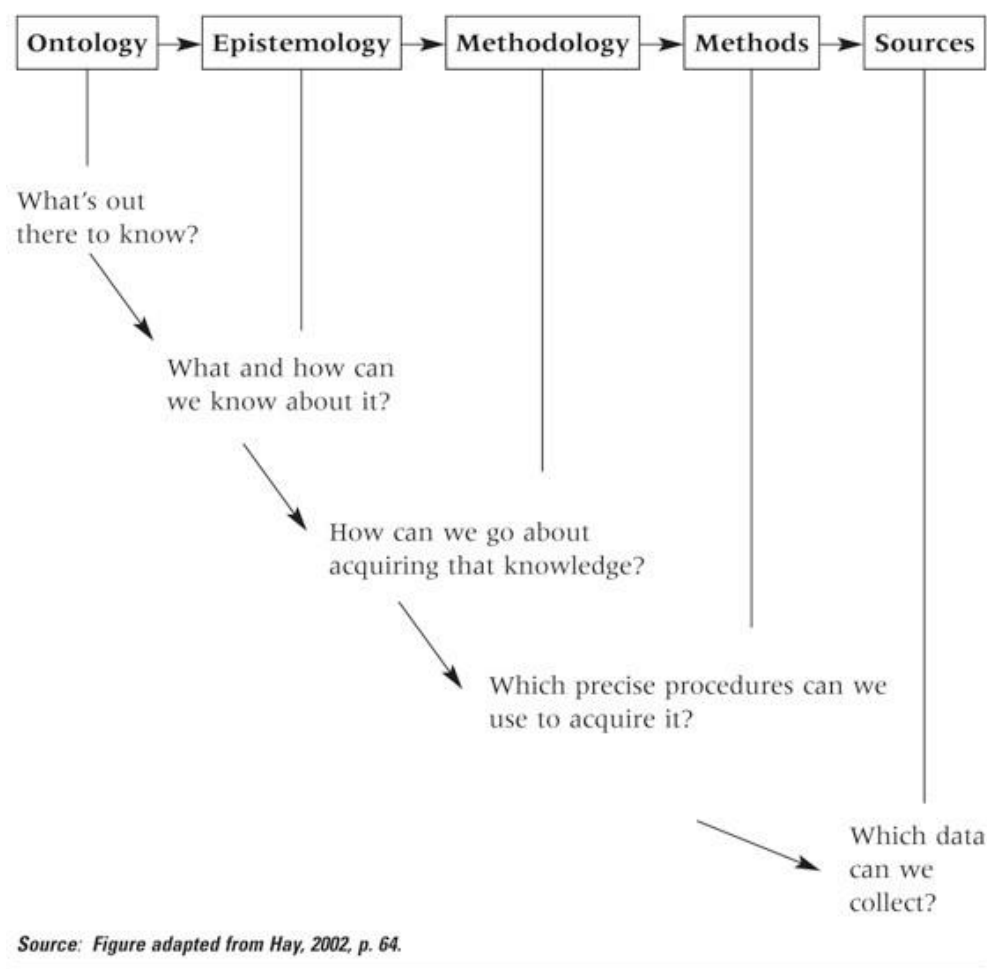
### **3.3 Philosophical approach – Section 2**

All research needs to fit within a philosophical framework. In taking an interpretivist (Bryman, 1998; Holloway & Wheeler, 2010; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Willis, 2007) and constructivist (Blaikie, 2007; Crotty 1998) perspective this study develops knowledge from exploring the participants' meaning and interpretation of the socially constructed experience of the (alleged) workplace bully. The researcher then constructs meanings and interpretations from these. It is this engagement in methods which are designed to afford the participant an opportunity to freely and without judgement engage in research which, in turn, will develop further research, better organisational and practitioner understanding and management action.

Glaser (1998) argues that conforming to a prescribed research philosophy "distorts" the discovery of theory and that as it is a conceptual methodology it does not have an epistemological or ontological stance. Locke (2001) notes that positioning grounded theory in a distinct or explicit research paradigm is problematic because of prior use in both interpretivist and objectivist approaches. However, putting this research into accepted frameworks, it is not possible to scientifically research workplace bullying as it has a socially constructed definition and meaning. The experience of individuals cannot be examined in a positivistic way; hence the engagement of the interpretive and inductive qualitative approach to grounded theory. Yoong (1996) discussed how grounded theory is particularly appropriate for the evaluation of personal experience where previous literature is scarce especially in

areas where the “the focus is on human experience and interaction when there is a high degree of applicability to practice” (Yoong, 1996, pp.33-35, cited in Pauleen, Corbitt & Yoong, 2007).

It is necessary for a researcher to reflect on their own views of the world and of social constructs within it, the way knowledge is perceived, acquired, developed and applied by individuals in order to appreciate how this will differ from person to person, event to event and by unit of analysis. It is the acknowledgement that this differs from person to person which is critical, however, with this understanding, consideration can then appropriately be given to the vehicles which will be (best) used to progress a philosophical and methodological strategy.



**Figure 1: The interrelationship between the building blocks of research**

Figure 1 illustrates how Grix (2010) adapted Hay's (2002) model demonstrating the logical incremental approach to research methodology and methods, suggesting that the interrelationship between the ontological, epistemological positions and the methodological approach must be understood by the researcher in order to understand their own impact on what can be studied and how this can be undertaken.

Crotty (1998), Gray (2014) and Grix (2010) all guard against developing 'method-led' research, noting instead that 'question-led' research, will point to the research methodology most appropriate for the study and one which offers the most likely strategy for comprehensive, reliable, valid research. Grix (2010, p.180) notes that having a research method before the research question defies the logic of the necessary connections which will afford a robust piece of research.

### **3.3.1 Ontology and epistemology**

Hay (2002, p.64) considers the question "What's out there to know?" the initial reference point for determining one's ontological position and Grix (2010) considers this the very starting point of all research. Gray (2014, p.19) notes that it is the existence and what establishes reality; that is the "what is". Whilst Grix (2010) proposes that the ontology and epistemology are logically ordered in this progressive interrelationship, both of the beliefs must be kept apart. In contrast however, Gray (2014) and Crotty (1998, p.10) counter this with views that the "ontological issues and epistemological issues tend to emerge together"; it is the overlap in building meaning which effectively builds meaningful reality that results in difficulties with keeping the two separate. Crotty (1998) considers it more meaningful to (in the main) dispense with the separate idea of ontology and focus constructively on the theoretical perspective which demonstrates how the researcher "sees the world" (Crotty 1998, p.11). The logical sequence for Crotty is represented in Table 1 overleaf.

Epistemology	Theoretical perspective	Methodology	Methods
Objectivism	Positivism Post-positivism	Experimental research Survey research Etc.	Sampling Measurement and scaling Statistical analysis Questionnaire Focus group Interview Etc.
Constructionism	Interpretivism <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Symbolic interactionism</li> <li>• Phenomenology</li> <li>• Hermeneutics</li> </ul> Critical Inquiry Feminism	Ethnography Grounded theory Phenomenological research Heuristic inquiry Action research Discourse analysis Feminist standpoint research Etc.	Qualitative interview Observation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participant</li> <li>• Non-participant</li> </ul> Case study Life history Narrative Theme identification Etc.
Subjectivism	Postmodernism Structuralism Post-structuralism	Discourse theory Archaeology Genealogy Deconstruction Etc.	Autoethnography Semiotics Literary analysis Pastiche Intertextuality Etc.

**Table 1: Relationship between epistemology, theoretical perspectives, methodology and research methods. Adapted from Crotty (1998, p.11) and Gray (2014, p. 23).**

This research takes both a social constructivist and interpretivist ontological and epistemological position; interpretivism accepts people construct meaning and reality for themselves. Although within grounded theory, the researcher takes the participant's accounts of experiences and realities to make sense of what is actually happening, what is of concern to them, thus, "social sciences often deal with the actions of the individual" (Gray, 2014, p.23).

In discussing the topic of workplace bullying, all the participants explained and shared their experiences; these experiences were understood by all participants to relate to workplace bullying. However, it must be acknowledged that each individual may define the term according to their specific experience, but with sufficient commonality to identify the term 'bullying' as associated with their lived experience. The term bully was widely accepted by participants, has HR policies and process written with it in mind and there are frequent references to bullying in the media (discussed in the literature review), thus there is an acceptance of a socially constructed and accepted phenomenon called bullying. The literature review (chapter 2) establishes that there is a paucity of research which has engaged with and considered the experiences and motives of the (alleged) workplace bully. Whilst people may define bullying in different ways, there is an acceptance that it exists which is evidenced in



the media, in literature, in theory and in workplace policy, procedures and processes. An individual's own definition can and does vary; social reality influences how bullying is seen and therefore will influence how participants in the relationship have talked about it. A practical example would be the actual definition which is given to workplace bullying itself which is also discussed in the literature review, chapter 2.

### **3.3.2 Theoretical Perspectives**

Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Lowe (2008) consider positivism and phenomenology to be the two main dimensions in terms of research with positivism being based on the structure of the social world existing externally and its dimensions should be measured through objective methods often in a laboratory style setting to isolate specific variables and to test hypotheses developed from theory. Researchers are not concerned with the subjective influences, such as the respondents' own feelings, beliefs or intuitions and as such these are removed by the research method.

The positivist paradigm (Bryman & Bell, 2011) is also characterised by a need for the researcher to be independent of the study and subject being studied so as not to influence or interfere with the matter under review. The results are always based on facts with the number of variables reduced to the minimum possible. In essence, these are the characteristics of pure "scientific inquiry" (Gray, 2014, p.23) based research, another researcher could repeat the study and exactly the same results would (or should) occur. Due to the nature of this research, the need to interact closely with the participants and ask them to discuss in detail their experiences and their reality, the positivist paradigm is not a suitable research vehicle to address the aims of this study, although the opposing dimension is.

Non-positivism or phenomenology (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Grix, 2010) is based on the assumptions that reality is socially constructed and the experiences that happen to an individual person will determine or influence their knowledge, views, beliefs and outlook. Robson (2002 p.22) discusses phenomenology as "research done in the real world, done with real people, done amongst these real people rather than research which is undertaken on the human equivalent of a lab rat." Robson (in Forte, 2002) further considers that the research is not undertaken to create more literature or statistical data, but rather it should be designed to be of benefit to the very people from which it was derived. Gray (2014) notes that Crotty's (1998) views considered interpretivism as the viable platform from which researchers could

seek to record and analyse participant's cultural and historical understanding and explanation of the social world which is 'real' to them.

The phenomenological paradigm is based on a foundation which considers that the differences between people must be accommodated in the research for it is this that will add to what already exists. In considering that research into workplace bullying with the (alleged) bully as the primary data source is scarce, there is no knowledge, no hypothesis for testing and no earlier work to attempt to validate; thus what is required is the "discovery of the basic social processes or recurrent themes... which link the experiences the participants discuss" (Charmaz, 2006, p.5).

### **3.3.3 Methodology**

To achieve the aims and objectives of this research, the critique is that of a qualitative perspective, it is the interpretivist research principles which consider the non-scientific and 'rich' data approach (Bryman, 2008). The researcher has considered options for this research study against the framework of the aims, objectives and resource constraints (Cesarani, 2003) in her methodological decision making.

Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2009) consider inductive research dimensions to be concerned in observing or engaging with participants when there is no well-known or universally accepted theory. Inductive reasoning considers a wide range of research, be it data collected, literature and existing theory reviews in order to take generalised concepts from the themes presented. In developing and progressing these themes the forging of a provisional hypothesis which can be scrutinised and tested to ultimately allow conception of a theory or to suggest best practice, supportive frameworks for management or recommendations for further study.

Saunders et al. (2009) contrast deductive research approaches, on the other hand, as requiring a theory from which a hypothesis or hypotheses can be tested and proved or nullified. Deductive research works through the stages in the reverse and culminates in specifics from a starting point of a generalised concept. This approach has been described as being 'top down' (Trochim, 2006) with initial thoughts around a subject for research which is clarified around a topic and the researcher would begin to consider a theory and a specific hypothesis to test, in testing this hypothesis the researcher then collects data, observes

behaviour or reviews previous work to test the hypothesis. The final point is the supporting or nullification of the hypothesis in order to confirm or disprove the original theory. Deductive reasoning in research is tightly focused and sets out to test or nullify hypotheses whilst inductive research is more preliminary initially, culminating in developing new or furthering existing theory (Saunders et al., 2009).

This research and thesis are concerned with developing a theoretical understanding of what is the experience and impact of being accused of being a workplace bully and generating an explanation for this with an inductive grounded theory approach.

### ***3.4 Grounded Theory: a methodology – Section 3***

Section three progresses the discussion around classical grounded theory (Glaser, 1978, 1992; Glaser & Strauss, 1967) as a methodology, considering its origins, approaches and the development from original work to later divergence and versions. The section then considers the application of the methodology for this study which is charted and justified through a review of the challenges and benefits of the grounded theory approach throughout the chapter.

#### **3.4.1 The heritage and foundations of grounded theory**

Glaser (1998, p.21) suggested that “grounded theory was discovered, not invented” from his work with Strauss in their 1967 text. The researchers sought to bridge the gap between the esteemed quantitative research which sought to confirm the researcher’s pre-conceived ideas and one which would present theory around what was actually taking place for the participants. Charmaz (2006) noted Glaser and Strauss sought to use a qualitative yet systematic rigorous process to develop a theoretical framework which explains a social process.

In the late 1960s, there was a prevalence of quantitative research (Pidgeon, 1996) which was able to demonstrate positivist assumptions, support or disprove hypotheses, be reliable, valid, replicable and generalizable (Charmaz, 2006). Concerns were widely held by researchers who advocated the positivist paradigm that qualitative research was an indulgence in impressions and anecdotes, which was not systematic and inherently biased (Charmaz, 2006). In looking for a way to blend the two methods of qualitative and quantitative research

Glaser and Strauss set out to take the precision of the positivist approach and offering 'systematic strategies' supported with practical tools they countered the ascendant methodological assumptions (Glaser, 1998) with qualitative research practice which afforded the same reassurance of fit, work, relevance and modifiability (Glaser, 1998; Charmaz, 2006).

Grounded theory does not validate or test existing theory, but seeks instead to inductively establish or generate the theory from the data gathered. In setting out their seminal texts for grounded theory, Glaser (1992), Glaser and Strauss (1967, p.3) were clear that in undertaking this methodology and method the researcher would develop "theory suited to its supposed uses.... that will fit the situation being researched and work when put to use." In essence, the achievement of fit will result from the emergence (not forcing) of categories shown by the data (Glaser 1992) and by 'work' the categories and theory should be able to explain differences in the participants' experiences or situational contexts (Hunter, Murphy, Grealish, Casey & Keady, 2011).

### **3.4.2 The development and divergence of grounded theory**

The development of grounded theory diverged over a period of time due to disagreements between its originators. It is recognised that grounded theory studies must demonstrate the historical and traditional conventions and explain where we are in the research. Grounded theory was developed together by Glaser and Strauss (1967), Glaser would say it was "discovered" (Glaser, 1992) and has become synonymous as a methodological approach which generates theory as a result of its emergence from data. Whilst Glaser has maintained this original focus, Strauss' has progressed from this to one which is more forced validation of theory through data. The diverging conceptual position between Glaser and Strauss became apparent in 1990 when Strauss published the text *Basics of Qualitative Research* with Corbin.

In essence, Strauss advocated a methodology concerned with the systematic validation of theory, whilst Glaser held that the emergence of theory is the primary methodological benefit. Furthermore, whilst Glaser discouraged researchers from undertaking a literature review prior to commencement of the study, for fear of developing pre-conceived ideas and influencing the data, Strauss approved of a literature review as this would improve theoretical sensitivity and alert the researcher to issues in the field (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). Glaser would later say that he continues to caution against reading the literature; after all, how do you know what to read until the core concerns from the participants has emerged through the data?

(Glaser, 2013, p.4). Strauss also developed the paradigm or hypothesis approach in order to facilitate a systematic process through which theories could be generated. For Glaser, this was not at all what the initial methodology had held dear as it would ultimately end in the forcing of categories from the data, rather than their development or emergence.

Glaser's response to Strauss' departure from these very core principles of their original work was critical, noting that grounded theory is now not the work of Strauss or later Strauss and Corbin (Glaser, 1992, p.7). Although Glaser's view that Strauss and Corbin's (1990) work contained many of the 'wrong ideas' which would be difficult to address in an article, Glaser's response was to publish *Basics of Grounded Theory; Emergence vs. Forcing* (1992) which he intended to be a corrective reply. It was particularly critical of Strauss and Corbin's (1990) text and included personal correspondence from Glaser to Strauss initially imploring him to "pull the book" admonishing Strauss for writing a new and different method (Glaser, 1992, p.2) as well as accusing Strauss of writing "without conscience, bordering on immortality." (Glaser, 1992, p.5).

Despite the acrimony between the two 'founding fathers' Glaser implored his 'friend' to return to the methodology they had created where the emergence of theory was at its core. Glaser was adamant that Strauss and Corbin's (1990) new methodology of forcing data through a coding technique was "too subtle for the average reader to follow, compare and critique" (Glaser 1992, pp.3-7) and accused Strauss of creating work which was "too cumbersome" and would ultimately be detrimental to qualitative research. Glaser's (1992) book admonished Strauss and Corbin for promoting a coding framework or paradigm which featured "conditions, context, action, interaction, strategies and consequences" and in doing so, their work had become a "full conceptual description", no longer grounded theory, but a new research method altogether. Glaser considered the methods Strauss and Corbin (1990) proposed to analyse data so forced he commented "if you torture the data enough, it will give up." (Glaser, 1992, p.123). Strauss and Corbin's (1990) book has met similar criticism from others; Eaves (2001) felt it was too unwieldy, with an elaborate coding technique with too many procedural steps and instructions and Partington (2002, p.138) felt the differing guidance and instruction from literature on the topic was "bewilderingly complex". Dey (1999) reproached both Glaser and Strauss for abandoning the original influential ideas.

So wide was the divergence that Glaser considered both methods should be clearly named; whilst grounded theory would continue to identify the original package, this should be

grounded theory for the Glaserian School and conceptual description for the Straussarian School (Stern, 1994). Corbin and Strauss (2008) proposed that rather than the separation and splitting of grounded theory, it was more a case of them working with the whole package as it developed and evolved in order for it to remain contemporary exemplifying this point with discussions on the value of information technology tools and platforms. Woods (2004) agrees with Corbin and Strauss' (2008) renewal and refreshing of the method, noting that it is not established as an age-old methodology yet and that whilst this means researchers will need to consider the developing traditions of both the Glaserian and Straussarian Schools, this continues to leave grounded theory (as a methodology) in a "state of evolution and flux" which is therefore appropriate to be the subject of "healthy argument" (Woods, 2004, p.4)

### **3.4.3 The development of constructivist grounded theory**

In recognising that a constructivist position is one where reality is brought about through the shared development or construction of both the researcher and the participants, Charmaz (2006) proposed the constructivist grounded theory perspective. Whilst acknowledging that as with 'classical' grounded theory, the constructivist version is open a variety of epistemological and ontological views, Charmaz (2000) also considers it to be flexible and well structured. In moving from a classical position where emerging categories form the basis of data for analysis, Charmaz (2009) posits the constructivist grounded theory perspective of the researcher co-constructing data which shapes the analysis.

### **3.4.4 Grounded theory: methodology selection**

A classical grounded theory method (Glaser, 1978, 1992; Glaser & Strauss, 1967) was selected for this study as it involves the approach of no pre-conceptions (Glaser, 1992, 1998, 2013) which fits not only with the research methodology but with the gap in knowledge and understanding of the perceptions and experiences of the alleged workplace bully.

Mindful of the constructivist approach to the relationship between researcher and participant (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 1998) in terms of analysis and the researcher's reluctance to be in a position where her earlier research could be considered influential in the study, the classical grounded theory method (Glaser, 1978, 1992; Glaser & Strauss, 1967) was selected. It is this classical grounded theory method (Glaser, 1978, 1992; Glaser & Strauss, 1967) which sets all this to one side and works from the approach of no pre-conceptions (Glaser, 1992,

1998, 2013) that can develop a theoretical framework or model borne from the (alleged) bully's perceptions and experiences.

The framework proposed for analysis by Strauss and Corbin (1990, 1998) with a tight and inflexible construction of rules and regulations, is criticised as being tantamount to forcing the data (Glaser 1992) and could not fit with the uncharted territory of the (alleged) workplace bully's perception. It was this constructivist approach rigidity that Keddy, Sims and Stern (1996) argued was simply not appropriate nor intended to be a framework against which data in grounded theory could be analysed. Accordingly, the classical grounded theory analysis model (Glaser, 1992, 1998) was the appropriate way forward.

The researcher considered classical grounded theory offered a methodology, perhaps no better, but no worse than others (Glaser, 1998), but certainly one which would complement the emergence of what was important to the (alleged) bully, rather than anything the researcher or the body of literature may deem important.

### **3.4.5 Central criteria for theory development**

The well-constructed grounded theory will fulfil the evaluation parameters or "central criteria" (Glaser, 1992, p.15) for the development of theory from data and the resulting grounded theory itself, shown in Table 2 overleaf. Initially Glaser and Strauss (1967) used the central criteria of fit, work and relevance with "modifiability" becoming an important criterion (Glaser, 1978, p.5). Glaser (1992) later noted the need for parsimony and scope to be considered in the generation of the grounded theory and in demonstrating rigour. Table 2 sets out the criteria briefly; these are revisited in the discussions presented in Chapter 6 in a discussion of the theoretical model's credibility.

Criteria	Explanation
<b>Fit</b>	The fit of the core category to the instances and responses to the main problem.
<b>Work</b>	The theory will work in explaining variations between participant's experience and/or behaviour.
<b>Relevance</b>	The fit and work are considered relevant for other studies, researchers, practitioners and participants.
<b>Modifiability</b>	Core categories will fit, work and have relevance but maintain the ability to flex or modify should further data become available.
<b>Parsimony</b>	Adoption of the simplest assumption in the formulation of a theory or in the interpretation of data.
<b>Scope</b>	The extent of the subject matter that deals with or to which it is relevant.

**Table 2: Grounded theory central criteria (Glaser, 1998, pp.18-19)**

### ***3.5 Procedural approach to the research - Section 4***

Section four focuses on the research sampling strategy engagement and recruitment of participants to the study.

#### **3.5.1 Sampling strategy**

In determining a sampling structure which would balance the aims of the study with grounded theory, Duffy, Ferguson and Watson (2004) note there must be a fusion of the three aspects of participant selection, data collection and data analysis. The selection of the study participants is discussed here, with the approach to data analysis presented in the following chapter.

The number of participants was considered in terms of apportionment of resources, but was not specifically set; Kumar (2014) notes that effective qualitative research will not set limits on sample size, but will continue until data saturation is achieved. A requisite of grounded theory is that the researcher will indeed continue to gather data about a theoretical core category until there are no further discernments; Beck (2004) countered though that the data is saturated when no new information (pertinent to the categories/core concept) emerges. That said, Kumar (2014, p.40) contrasts this with caution around achieving 'value for money' in balancing outlay of resources with "maximum provision". Theoretical sensitivity is



fundamental in the development of grounded theory (Glaser, 1978; Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and is a dimension of the grounded theory package which emerges over time as the researcher is collecting and analysing the data through constant comparison, looking at the concerns with the first participant in order to notice whether these are strengthened or weakened by the next and so on as well as being "insightful" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967 p.46). The researcher's theoretical sensitivity was heightened not only by the collected data, but also by the previous research she had undertaken and her experience as an HR professional, her involvement in workplace grievances and disputes (including workplace bullying cases), mediating, mentoring and through her wider awareness of ill health and well-being at work.

Initially, at design stage, the considerations around the sampling strategy included word-of-mouth networking with the researcher's HR connections, the possible use of her current work situation, professional networks or social media to attract participants should the former not generate sufficient numbers (Lee, 1993). It was not necessary to resort to social media as a recruitment tool; had it been though there were concerns that it would be too 'visible' an arena to encourage potential participants to discuss something as personal or sensitive as being a bully.

Accordingly, the study adopted a purposive sample, from a population defined as those who had been accused of being a workplace bully, the self-selecting, purposeful sample of participants, who Horn (2012) notes as having presented themselves for the research programme, came about. Kumar (2014) also adds that a purposive sample is particularly helpful when investigating a phenomena or issue about which little is known. Davies and Hughes' (2014) work concurs with an approach which supports the identification and involvement of an audience which are likely to be representative of the population to be studied.

Another approach would have been to use a convenience sample; Davies and Hughes (2014, p.61) note that a convenience sample is one where the researcher will "simply take what you can get where you can most easily get it", however this approach does not allow the researcher to have any jurisdiction over the participants. By being clear whether participants meet the criteria of having been the subject of an allegation that they were a workplace bully in the first instance made effective and efficient use of resources which would have otherwise been significantly overspent.

There were risks that a snowball sample (Kumar, 2014) may establish itself after an early interview, when the participant offered to discuss the research with their colleague who had been involved in the same incident but no further contact came of it. Whilst snowball sampling is noted as using networks to obtain participants, (Kumar, 2014) it was the networking within the researcher's HR community that was used to circulate details of the study, but was then not subsequently involved in the onward research. The HR community was only used to identify possible respondents for the purposive sample and had no further involvement. Bryman and Bell (2011) discuss the potential for a community-bias, as a result of a snowball sample, as best avoided unless it is the strategy of the research as it weakens the representativeness of the population which in turn may affect the reliability of the results.

Whilst the study did successfully recruit participants, the researcher and supervisor had been concerned that this may be difficult; inherently, it seems, no one wants to admit they are a bully as participants in the study likened being accused of this to an accusation of racism, rape or child molestation during their interviews with the researcher. This relative scarcity of participants, coupled with the expectations of the Professional Doctorate programme after initially expecting a target of six participants, another two volunteers came forward, making the total sample size eight. The researcher accepts that this was a small sample size and despite not being able to saturate some codes, it was the continual repetition (Beck, 2004) that in the codes that offered reassurance that the grounded theory had developed. There was an emergence of core themes from the second and third interviews which informed the theory and the sample size was however "appropriate for in depth studies of experiences and perceptions in grounded theory" (Matthews & Ross, 2010, p.167).

The profiles of participants who agreed to participate in the research were kept brief, particularly as anonymity and confidentiality were crucial to their involvement, accordingly, biographical data was not sought although an understanding of their work arena was.

### **3.5.2 Participant engagement and recruitment**

Whilst this strategy afforded a purposive sample the researcher acknowledged that there is a need for much discretion in order to maximise the likelihood of volunteers coming forward. Initial concerns around participant numbers did not materialise, indeed the researcher had been approached on two separate occasions by two individuals who wished to participate in the study; perhaps suggesting that there was an opportunity for the (alleged) bully to have a voice as a result of the researcher's genuine interest in this field of study.

Each participant contacted the researcher after hearing about the study as a result of an HR network which the researcher had spoken at, or who had attended themselves or, had heard about the study from a research group of which the researcher is a member. Initial enquiries from potential participants received an informal briefing by e-mail, telephone or face to face with the researcher. A formal letter with fuller details of the research was then supplied to participants which they were asked to acknowledge receipt of prior to the interview commencing. Copies of these documents are presented in Appendices 1 and 2 respectively. In the research proposal the researcher had noted that in order to maximise the likelihood of volunteers, communication only progressed with the (potential) respondent, not with anyone who may have effected their introduction. Details of the participants are provided in Section 5.2 and Table 3 in Chapter 5 where the research findings are presented.

### ***3.6 Ethical considerations and management – Section 5***

Section five considers the necessary ethical measures and management required in order to safeguard and fulfil the researcher's duty of care of the participants. The application and procedure to secure University of Huddersfield's ethical approval is also explained.

#### **3.6.1 Ethical considerations**

The researcher acknowledged that a person who may have been acutely affected by a serious episode at work might be (or become) distressed in relating the details. It was certainly not the aim of the research to cause upset or distress; Horn (2012) notes that research should do no harm. As a researcher, the author was mindful that it is not her role to be therapist or counsellor, but there was acknowledgement in the research proposal that as a qualified mediator and mentor and with much experience in a range of work related interviewing over many years' experience in senior HR management posts, this brings an understanding and ability to support and manage any distress sensitively and effectively (Mertens, 2010).

The research methodology and methods were designed with an ethical stance in mind. Murphy and Dingwall (2014, p.339) discuss "ethical practice" which sets out four overarching principles in recommending a research code of practice based on informed consent. These principles are:

- Non-maleficence – whereby researchers must be mindful to avoid harming participants.
- Beneficence – whereby research must have a purpose that can be understood by participants and this purpose must be to produce a positive consequence. Research for the sake of research is not sufficient; there must be an effective and beneficial purpose.
- Autonomy or self-determination – whereby the views, values, beliefs, thoughts and actions of participants are to be respected at all times.
- Justice – whereby all parties involved in the research and study should be treated equally.

The researcher committed to ensuring the confidentiality and anonymity of all participants and did not ask them for any form of biographical data. The gender and information about personal characteristics which were protected under the Equality Act (2010) were discussed in some interviews and are included in the discussions due to their particularly pertinent coding/category. Any identifying details or names recorded in the interview transcripts were changed or given a labelling number, otherwise the recording was transcribed verbatim. Anonymity was further preserved by ensuring that data was held under coded identifiers password protected at a single site and in accordance with the Data Protection Act (1998). The hard and soft copy of the transcripts, data, analysis and coding mapping, physical and electronic documentation was maintained by the researcher personally with due care and diligence. Issues of power asymmetry, 'interviewer as friend' and the reality of achieving 'justice' (Murphy & Dingwall, 2014) are discussed in Section 6, of this chapter.

The researcher discussed and provided a written supporting document which set out the purpose of the study, what the research methods were and the possible uses of the completed research with each participant and sought specific consent to record the interview. Participants were offered the opportunity to see the transcripts when complete and to withdraw from the study at any time. These documents are presented in Appendices 1, 2 and 3.

The researcher is a Chartered Fellow of the CIPD; such recognition demonstrates her competence, knowledge and acknowledges her experience. All Institute members are bound by the Code of Conduct (CIPD, 2014) which sets out clearly that it is not only the University of Huddersfield standards which must be adhered to, but those of the professional body as well.

### **3.6.2 Ethical approval**

The ethical approval for the study was requested from the Ethics Committee for The Business School at the University of Huddersfield and was approved outright in December 2013. The approval documents are presented in Appendix 4.

## **3.7 Data collection – Section 6**

Section six reviews the data collection methods of interviewing in research, with the requisite skill and awareness that is required to encourage participants whilst drawing rich data. In discussing the interview management before and during the interview, the researcher notes the practical elements and how challenges were prepared for and overcome. The therapeutic impact of being a research participant is discussed and the section is completed with consideration of the grounded theory rationale for the motif 'all is data' (Glaser, 1992, p.24).

### **3.7.1 Interviewing in research**

Horn, (2012, p.119) considered qualitative research to be exploratory, seeking to hear what was the experience for the research participant, what are their meanings, their perceptions and their understanding; and that the analysis would use induction to develop the research. Glaser (1992, pp.11-12) notes that grounded theory requires researchers to have 'conceptual skills' which, coupled with qualitative methods reveal the milieu of "people's experiences and perspectives which are as yet little known in the world of research products... And the equivalent cannot be tapped into easily with quantitative methods."

Kvale (2006, p.481) asserts that in undertaking qualitative research it is necessary for researchers to endeavour to not only see, but to "unfold the meaning" of a participant's experience and point of view. Interviews which afford participants the opportunity to have a 'voice', particularly if that is one which is not of the perspective usually heard can, if appropriately managed, result in qualitative data which is richer in narrative, a "deep, intense and 'holistic' overview" (Gray, 2014). Charmaz (2014, p.85) considers 'intensive interviewing' appropriate for data collection within a grounded theory methodology as it has the necessary flexibility to adapt as the interviewee's narrative, where the primary purpose of the interviewer is to listen initially and then seeks to ensure a thorough understanding of the interviewee's experience.

Grix (2010, p.126) considers interviewing a research methodology which enables researchers to harvest empirical data from the field it is occurring in and that this can be done through four interview types: structured, semi-structured, unstructured and group interview. Horn (2012, p.121) acknowledges that an unstructured interview will afford the maximum possible malleability. Alaszewski (2006) contrasts this with a caution that when interviewing retrospectively there are risks that participants may not recall with as much clarity as they would have done earlier; however in reality, each participant was very clear about the sequences of events, the issues, concerns and of their experience which is discussed in subsequent chapters.

### **3.7.2 Unstructured interviews**

Whilst structured interviewing will usually include a battery of prescribed questions, Horn (2012, p.121) notes that unstructured interviews are less constrained for interviewers and as a result are more flexible in nature. It is this flexibility Grix (2010, p.129) noted which makes unstructured interviews ideal for developing questions which further develop the context of the participant's story in-situ, in order to explore the concepts which are relevant not only to the discussion, but also to the research topic. Kumar (2014, p.192) concurs noting that unstructured interviewing allows the researcher to deviate from an initial course or pathway should the need arise.

Bryman and Bell (2011, p.472) propose that if a researcher seeks to genuinely understand the views and experiences of people who share a common experience or attribute, unstructured interviewing is preferable; it is with this unstructured approach that researchers are more likely to see things as the participants see them. Crotty (1998) is clear that an unstructured interview would have open-ended questions, if it needs to have any at all. With this as a benchmark, any emerging data stems from the themes of the participant's experience, hence it cannot be accused of being biased on the part of the researcher as it is "without the prejudice of forced ideas" (Crotty 1998, p.83). Glaser (1992, p.3) states unequivocally that grounded theory was created as a methodology that had the emergence of data (rather than it being forced) at its very core.

The only question of primary import in this research was "Tell me how it came about that you were accused of being a workplace bully?" This question was designed to be bias free (with the acknowledgement that the participant already met the criteria of having been accused) as well as one which encouraged "rambling" (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p.467). In creating a

question which the participant could explore in their own way gave a response through which the researcher could understand what was pivotal, crucial, critical and important in their experience. Flick (2014, p.198) notes that it is the "interviewer's generative narrative question" which will pin-point the interviewee to the event or experience the participant should address. In a personal conversation with Barney Glaser, he critiqued the question, advising: "you are not constructing the data by the style of your interview... the question is good, very good and it will work!" (Glaser, personal communication, December 19, 16:58 GMT, 2012).

Grix (2010, p.129) notes that unstructured interviews may initially offer an effective starting point in data collection as they afford the interviewee opportunities to bring forward themes, issues or concerns that the researcher may not have considered. It is this premise though that causes concern; as the data collection progresses the content will differ from each participant which renders analysis difficult (Grix, 2010, p.129). Contrasting this though, is grounded theory's key concept that is in looking at each separate unit of analysis, in its own unique circumstances which leads to the emergence of new theory. (Glaser, 1992, 1998). Despite Grix's (2010, p.128) concerns of how unstructured interviewing opens up "avenues of investigation" the resulting data presents the participant's experience not the researchers; in Glaser's (1992, 1998) view an emergence of theory which can continue to be explored and refined until theoretical saturation is achieved.

The researcher considered whether the in-depth interviews with participants could be biographical. Denzin (1989, p.27) considered the biographical field as being particularly wide, commenting it encompasses "life, self, experience, epiphany, case, autobiography, ethnography, auto-ethnography, biography, ethnography story, discourse, narrative, narrator, fiction, history, personal history, oral history, case history, case study, writing presence, difference, life history, life story and personal experience story". This method was discounted as it is not the purpose of this study to consider whether an individual's background or life shaping events could have impacted on their position in the (alleged) bullying relationship although the researcher does note this may make a valuable contribution to research focused on the perspective of the bully.

Blaikie (2000, p.234) proposes the notion of an 'oral-history' interview which asks only open-ended questions to interviewees and in replying, the focus is on the "aspects of their lives". Kumar (2014, p.194), by contrast would expand Blaikie's position to the technique of

gathering data through the use of the participant's narrative. Kumar (2014, p.194) considers oral-history interviews more appropriate and more usually used to discuss cultural customs over a long history, the handing on from one generation to the next a traditional or social event. It is the narrative technique which Kumar (2014, p.194) considers as an especially powerful method of data collection as it is more concerned with the participant's personal experience and recollection of a specific incident or experience, especially when undertaking research which is sensitive in nature, such as bullying. In seeking the retelling of being accused of being a bully and addressing the research questions, it was key to the researcher that this lay not only in hearing of the experience, but also of the impact it had on the participant and their wider personal and workplace circumstances.

Wengraf (2001) considered the use of narrative interviewing appropriate for qualitative research although there is a need for the researcher to be particularly mindful of the significant and necessary effort, planning and skills required to execute the research interview. The researcher feels that interviewing is a key skills she possesses and that her past (research and organisational) performance demonstrates she can create an environment where participants can re-live, re-tell or be interviewed about their experiences. Witkin and Poupart (1985) similarly note that it is in this in-depth, unstructured interviewing that a research participant will present much qualitative rich data; this was achieved through developing an environment of psychological safety (Dindia, 2002) in which participants were encouraged through a non-directive interview to relate their experiences freely and in doing so, made their 'story' come to life for the researcher.

### **3.7.3 Interview recording**

Glaser's opinion on the issue of taping or recording interviews is clear: "DO NOT TAPE INTERVIEWS" (Glaser, 1998 p.107). Grounded theory researchers should instead make field notes during and after interviews (Gray, 2014 p.177; p.604) to capture their "personal comments and interpretations". However, in his 1992 text, Glaser notes that the first interview and the field notes should be transcribed entirely, but as interviews progress the need for this is removed as the categories and concerns emerge and the researcher seeks to support them.

However, there are a plethora of good reasons to record and transcribe interviews (Heritage, 1984; Bryman & Bell, 2011; Charmaz, 2014; Flick, 2014) including the researcher being able to concentrate and focus on the interviewee so the discussion between them flows more



easily. Heritage (1984, p.238) provided the following list of advantages of the recording and transcription of data:

- As being available for review in order to correct the natural limitations of our memory,
- Allows for examination and re-examination of what was said,
- Is repeatedly available for scrutiny and it is available for others to undertake the evaluation,
- Creates a record which could be available to deny another's claim it was not satisfactorily analysed,
- The original researcher can re-use the data in other ways.

Glaser (1998) specifically refutes these advantages, professing that it is the 'open' nature of the methodology and analysis in grounded theory which removes doubts concerning the researcher being biased or selective in note taking and considers the recording of interviews to be one of the "strongest evidentiary invasions into grounded theory" (Glaser, 1998, p.107). Glaser (1998) considers that recording undermines confidentiality but it does allow for the reusing of the data at a later stage. However, if confidentiality is reassured in terms of anonymity, an ethical approach to research is maintained and data storage complies with legislative and research expectations these concerns can be minimised, if not mitigated (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Charmaz, 2014; Heritage 1984). The researcher believes it would always be necessary to consider though what the participant's consent was sought for and it would be ethically rigorous to expect both this and the inspection of the data by other parties to have been specifically obtained.

So, with concerns that recording will delay the theoretical sampling and analysis Glaser (1998) considers both the recording, but more so the transcription time a drain on valuable resources. Noting that an hour of recording will take between 5 and 6 hours to transcribe, the researcher can be better placed to use their field notes to capture thoughts during the interview, as soon as practical afterwards and Glaser (1978) refutes that memory of the interview lapses afterwards, noting that the researcher's recollections of the interview become clearer and "gets better and better... as the grounded theory develops" Glaser (1978, p.53). Charmaz (2014) considers the recording of interviews beneficial, as it allows the interviewer to focus on the interviewee, demonstrating the necessary verbal and non-verbal cues that evidence active listening and that field notes can be made if they are not a distraction to either party.

So, from a purist Glaserian perspective one would not record the interviews, however there is disagreement from other sources and from the researcher's perspective adopting the safer

and more robust approach of gathering a transcript to enable time and ongoing development of theoretical perspectives encouraged a more reflective coding and decision making process.

It was with this in mind that the researcher made recordings of interviews she undertook; she had been concerned that the participants, who had all been the subject of formal allegations of workplace bullying were (likely to have been) subject of an investigation and that this would have been in the presence of a note-taker and felt that if a similar environment or scenario was enacted it would not encourage the interviewee to tell of their experience to the fullest possible extent. In giving the interviewee her full attention, the researcher sought to ensure the rapport between the two was maintained (Bryman & Bell, 2011) and although she did take thorough field notes during and after the interview and memos thereafter, she made no attempt to make a verbatim record which may have happened during an investigation procedure in the workplace.

The researcher wanted to avoid collecting “properline data”, which Glaser describes as being what the participant thinks the interviewer wants to hear in order for the interview to be complete as soon as possible (Glaser 1998, p.110) and believed her approach did achieve this as the transcripts produced ranged from 4,650 words to 20,010 words. The shortest interview was still a lengthy time of 80 minutes and the longest interview was two and a half hours.

The researcher had intended to remain close to the data and undertake the transcription herself, however this became an unmanageable task and the services of a professional transcription service were engaged. Furthermore, the impact of the sheer volume of transcribed work was overwhelming. Glaser (1992, p.112) notes that not only does the recording and transcription delay the analysis and theoretical sampling of the data; it produces an abundance of data. Glaser’s advice changes and might appear to contradict what was previously expected in gathering data “better more than less transcribed data” (Glaser 1992, p.20) was later followed by his “cardinal rule” that interviews must not be recorded (Glaser 1998, p.107).

Glaser (1992, 1998) also encourages researchers to enter the field of study without delay, without the immersion into the available literature and he uses the mantra “Just do it” (Glaser, 1998, p.19). As it was, despite the researcher’s best intentions, she did just that and entered the field with her recording advice without awareness that this might compromise her study.

The fullness of the debate around recording came to light when the transcripts produced vast amounts of paper, data and analysis, so much so that the analysis was far from complete when the second interview was arranged. The researcher took advice and guidance from a range of sources, discussing the issue with her supervisor and reviewing other literature. Bryman and Bell (2011) discussed how partial transcription is invaluable and Meuser and Nagal (2009) note it is this need for a pragmatic approach to transcription which provides data which is relevant to the research question.

As a result of the sheer size of the transcribed documents, the researcher was able to skim through some of the passages; there were between two and four pages of personal introduction (the University of Huddersfield, The Business School) and welcome (such as the weather, the travel to the interview) which were not centrally focused on the research question, so as such could be discounted. There was one central focused question that all participants were asked: 'Tell me how it came about that you were accused of being a workplace bully'. The welcome and introduction prior to this central question was a nicety, designed to develop rapport and establish a psychologically safe environment (Dindia, 2002), after which each interview began with the central question and the participant then developed their own story.

### **3.7.4 Interview management**

This section is sub-divided into pre, during and post interview procedure and management.

#### ***3.7.4.1 Pre-interview management***

In preparing for the data collection, the researcher considered whether interviews would be telephone, face to face or by Skype. Telephone interviews were discounted due to the expected length of the interview (60 to 90 minutes) because, although interviewees would have already agreed to participate Irvine (2011) noted the propensity for shallower, shorter responses and it would be difficult to demonstrate the researcher was listening intently without interrupting the flow of the participant's narrative. Shuy (2002, p.8) asserts "personal interviews" are likely to deliver better quality data than telephone interviews despite inconsistent evidence, it is when issues of a sensitive nature, such as workplace bullying are the focus of the interview that face to face should be the preferred option.

The researcher did consider Skype as an alternate to face to face interviewing and would have explored this option had a participant requested it, despite personal reservations the participant may be less engaged in the interview process. Gray (2014, p.405) notes that Skype as a communication interface would be more effective in developing trust than the telephone. The exchange of verbal and non-verbal cues, develops more of an interpersonal rapport between interviewer and interviewee, but issues with connectivity may cause difficulties which may result in the interview being abandoned (Gray, 2014). As it was, all participants were individually interviewed face to face; seven of these were at the researcher's university, the other was interviewed at their home, at their request.

In preparing for the interview, cognisant of the advice offered by Bryman and Bell (2011, p.211) as a check-list, the researcher prepared and made sure that consent forms (presented in Appendix 3) and the formal research information letter (presented in Appendix 2) were printed and ready. Interviewees were provided with details of the arrangements, time, date, location, in order that they would feel prepared and each was met at the reception desk by the researcher in order to develop a rapport prior to the interview commencing. Grant (2000, p.7) notes that preparing interviewees in this way will help them feel prepared.

The researcher considered subtle yet important points which she expected should create an atmosphere of her professionalism and personal style; a box of tissues was placed discretely out of initial sight of the interviewee, the interviewer's attire was understated and 'corporate' (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p.210) in order to mirror as wide a range of people as possible. The researcher also made effective use of her interviewing skills in terms of verbal and non-verbal communication in order to create an impression that was "objective, professional and detached yet relaxed and friendly" (Oppenheim, 1992; Gray 2014, pp.393-394).

In preparation for the interview which took place at the participant's home, the researcher considered advice around both her own and the participant's safety and well-being (Fahie, 2014). Measures for the researcher included: making sure her partner knew where she was going, how long she expected to be and to telephone her partner when she returned to her car.

### **3.7.4.2 Management during the interview**

Individual interviews at the university took place in a private office where there would be no interruptions and information about the study, anonymity and confidentiality was discussed with the participant. For the participant interviewed at their home, the same discussions were held and there were similarly no interruptions.

The interview started with a preamble which re-visited the information participants had been supplied in the invitation letter, recapping on the purpose of the research and seeking specific consent from the participant to record the interview. This, along with the consent forms (presented in Appendix 3) gave the participants a thorough understanding of what would happen during and after the interview, establishing and developing rapport which Oppenheim (1992) discussed as being 'elusive' and essential.

The initial interview question 'Tell me how it came about that you were accused of being a workplace bully?' resulted in a (lengthy) narrative from the interviewee and during this time the researcher actively listened but did not interrupt beyond acknowledging her interest; Kumar (2014, p.194) cautions the research that this is the time when the interviewee must be allowed to "talk freely and without [the researcher] interrupting". After the narrative, the researcher moved to unstructured interviewing techniques, seeking to understand more about the participant's experience and the impact it had had on them. Following the initial interview question, the researcher attempted to develop the interview in an impartial and unbiased way, cognisant that Glaser (1992, p.51) cautions the researcher that it is essential that any questions connected to emerging categories and codes are "totally neutral" in the way they are addressed to the interviewee. If this were not the case and the question was asked directly, this would "preconceive the emergence" of data; in effect forcing it from the researcher's preconceived idea (Glaser, 1992, p.25).

As discussed previously, participants had been given sufficient information to thoroughly understand the purpose of the research, what it intended to achieve and that their experience would not be repeated in such a way they could be identified, this developed and led to what Kumar (2014, p.191) termed "motivation to share". Participants were encouraged to explore more of their experiences through the use of probes (Robson, 2002). Probes in interviewing are particularly useful as they help researchers understand more from the interviewee on

specific concerns or narrative by encouraging the interviewee to consider and discuss their thoughts, motivations and experience further (Easterby-Smith et al., 2008).

In concluding the interview, participants were thanked for their generosity, for their time and for discussing and sharing their experience (Bryman & Bell 2011, p.210). Participants were also given reassurance about how the data would be used and stored.

#### **3.7.4.3 Post-interview management**

Bryman and Bell (2011, p.476) offer advice designed to capture the researcher's thoughts and ideas after the interview. Using this guidance, the researcher created a post-interview pro-forma (presented in Appendix 5) to capture her feelings, concepts and begin the processes of reflection and reflexivity. Emerson, Fretz and Shaw (1995, p.19) noted that field researchers will often record "details and impressions" from their data collection which they named "head notes". The pro-forma developed as result of the researcher's 'head notes' and this in turn led to a greater awareness of conceptual skill development which Glaser (1992, pp.11-12) notes all grounded theory researchers require.

Grix (2010, p.127) recommends that analysis should commence as soon as is possible post-interview to best capture recollections and thoughts "while the interview is still fresh in your mind". Lofland & Lofland (1995) give similar advice, adding that transcription should not be left until the end of the interviews and/or data collection; researchers should be able to see or become attuned to the developing and/or emerging themes that can be asked about in a more focused way in subsequent studies. Whilst Glaser (1992, 1998) agrees that analysis should begin with immediate effect, it is not necessary to transcribe everything, nor is it appropriate to ask questions related to an emerging category (Glaser 1992, p.25). In line with the grounded theory methodology, data analysis ran concurrently with further interviewing.

#### **3.7.5 Therapeutic impact**

Kumar (2014, p.194) notes the potential for narrative re-telling in particular to be therapeutic for participants. The researcher drew on her interviewing, listening and rapport building skills and experience whilst remaining conscious of her role of researcher not therapist or counsellor to manage the interviews as data collection vehicles only. It was in the opportunity to be

heard and believed rather than be investigated or judged and in doing so have a 'voice' (Kvale, 2006, p.81) that Kumar (2014, p.194) notes may "help a person feel more at ease with the event". Discussing personal, traumatic or private experiences in a supportive, non-judgemental research setting can (begin to) legitimise their experience which in turn makes it a cathartic encounter (Dyregrov, 2004; Newman, Willard, Sinclair & Kaloupek, 2001). This was acknowledged by some participants who, either at the time or after the interview contacted the researcher to thank her for the opportunity to participate in the research and for listening to their experiences.

### **3.7.6 All is data**

Two of the eight participants shared their personal 'diaries' with the researcher, one during and one after the interview, on the basis that they would remain strictly private and confidential, for the researcher only to review. A third participant commented that he had re-read all the organisational paperwork before coming to the interview to prepare himself. Both of the extant diaries focused solely on the bullying related event and as they were unsolicited, their content described events from the participant's experience (Bloor, 2002, p.93) without any loss of clarity or perspective over time. In accepting the diaries into the data, the researcher could gain further insight, information and data itself. The researcher found there was little difference between the contemporaneously written and the later spoken versions of events by the participants; such seemed the clarity of their later recollections (in interview).

Glaser (1992, p.24) see also Glaser & Strauss 1967) considered data of any description "grist for the mill" and is therefore valuable and useable in comparing, contrasting, confirming and developing categories, providing it is treated as data and not an opinion or preconceived idea held by a researcher which is allowed to influence the study (Gibson & Hartman, 2014).

## **3.8 Chapter synopsis**

This chapter reviewed the methodology and the methods that formed the research framework for this study, considering how grounded theory supported the aims and objectives when there is a paucity of extant literature and knowledge about the perceptions and experiences of the (alleged) bully. In fully discussing the grounded theory approach, theoretical perspectives, divergence and development, the sampling strategy and ethical considerations were explained and critiqued. The research methods were discussed and an evaluation of the

interviewing techniques was analysed, with acknowledgement that other supporting data was also useful.

The following chapter will consider the data analysis for this research, setting out the tenets of grounded theory in order to provide a comprehensive analytical procedure.



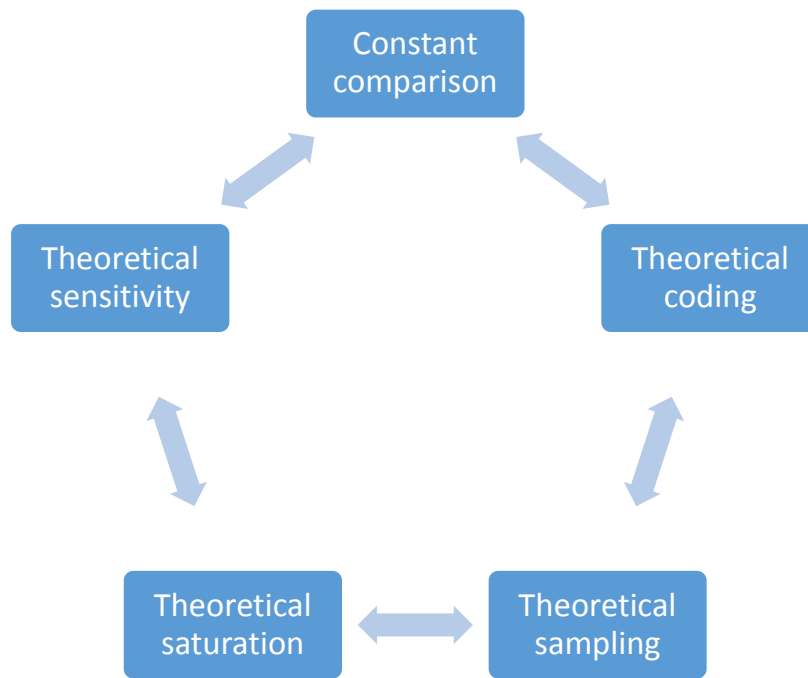
## **Chapter 4: The approach to data analysis**

### ***4.1 Chapter overview***

This chapter discusses the how the data were analysed in accordance with the conventions of the classical grounded theory method (Glaser, 1978, 1992; Glaser & Strauss, 1967) in a series of six of sections. The first considers the iterative analytical tenets of grounded theory, setting the scene for the following sections. Sections two to six consider theoretical coding, constant comparison, theoretical sampling, saturation and sensitivity respectively. In a critical evaluation, the framework for the analysis in this study is reviewed and examined as an emerging grounded theory for the research emerged. A brief synopsis finishes this chapter.

### ***4.2 The tenets of grounded theory data analysis – Section 1***

The grounded theory tenets are a set of tools which are sufficiently flexible to analyse qualitative or quantitative data across an equally diverse spectrum of study. The tenets operate within an overarching methodology which has a structured, logical and robust set of procedural stages which are sufficiently closely aligned “with the canons of good science” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p.392) to evidence reliable and valid research. Figure 2 overleaf illustrates these interwoven analytical tenets of grounded theory.



**Figure 2: The analytical tenets in grounded theory methods (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p.392; O'Reilly, Paper & Marx, 2012, p.248)**

O'Reilly, Paper and Marx (2012) draw on an extensive range of grounded theory literature to present a carefully constructed pathway through the grounded theory analysis, noting it is essential that all these tenets are gainfully employed. There is a prevalent selective approach towards analysis, using an "a la carte" (O'Reilly et al., 2012, p.256) approach which will not enable the researcher to develop a theory. If only individual tenets were selected, rather than the complete framework Glaser (1998), Glaser & Strauss (1967) and O'Reilly et al. (2012) concur the results will only offer a set of findings and not progress to full theory development. The five fundamental principles in grounded theory analysis are not a sequential or linear process, but one which is "designed to systematically and carefully build theory" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p.26) although, crucially for Glaser (1998) it is as these tenets overlap, interweave and cycle back and forth, the true emergence of grounded theory takes shape.

Accordingly, the researcher mapped out and carefully reviewed the data within the systematic analytical framework and this is discussed in the following sections.

### **4.3 Theoretical coding – Section 2**

Theoretical coding is, in essence concerned with making sense of the data. Goulding (2002) and Locke (2002) discussed this is best achieved by putting similar experiences into groups or categories, then titling the experiences in order that they can be compared with the other occurrences in the data. Once grouping has begun, the researcher will identify differences and similarities from earlier data with later or subsequent data until such a time they become predictable and persistent, steady and unchanging and are repeated and repeated in the data.

The data coding began during the first interview in this research; when the participant repeated their concerns on an issue the researcher noted this as being of interest. Data coding should start as soon as practically possible and in order to capture initial thoughts, the researcher developed the pro-forma presented in Appendix 5 to record these details.

Initial open coding and labelling was useful in noting what was going on in the data. Glaser (1978) considers a line by line coding approach as an “intense activity” but it does enable the researcher to disaggregate the data in order to then conceptually group it into codes, then concepts, then categories through which the grounded theory develops (Glaser, 1978, p.55).

The first interview transcript commenced with line by line coding and there seemed to be a repeated issue for the interviewee which offered early suggestion of a substantive code. Later data added to and developed this into a concept and then category, but this could not have been known initially.

#### **4.3.1 *In vivo* coding**

As the line by line coding resulted in a significant volume of codes, it became clear that there would also be merit in using *in vivo* codes. Glaser (1998) notes that this coding strategy, which uses the interviewee’s words to describe their experience of the event is useful in keeping their meaning absolutely true and therefore nullifying any criticism of the researcher having a preconceived influence. Whilst this *in vivo* coding added to the volume of codes, there was clearly an emerging interest with the continual repetition of certain words and/or phrases from different interviewees.

#### **4.4 Constant comparison – Section 3**

The tenet of constant comparison is broken down into four stages (detailed below) but in essence is concerned with the “simultaneous coding and analysis of data” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

- Comparison of incidents which apply to each category,
- Integration of categories and their properties,
- Delimiting the theory,
- Writing the theory.

As contemporaneous collection, coding and analysis of data took place, new data was reviewed against earlier evidence and the researcher remained insightful. Deploying these “conceptual skills” (Glaser, 1992, p.11) was necessary so that the ongoing analysis developed categories based around the problems and concerns of the participants (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Furthermore, Glaser and Strauss advocated the collection, coding and analysis as so pivotal to the development of theory that they are seen to “blur and intertwine continually” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p.43).

As the constant comparison is an examination of data through a recurring series of events, the researcher recognised and developed the theoretical underpinnings of the significant concepts and potential categories emerged. After the first interview had been undertaken and whilst coding, the researcher started to use in a memo jotter and SimpleMind© (a mind mapping, idea collection and thought structuring tool) to capture her intuitive thoughts on the meanings and concepts within the data. Writing memos during the data collection and analysis processes helped to map out what were emergent social patterns from the data (Glaser, 1992) as they keep a track of the ideas the researcher has (Glaser, 1998). Repeating the process of constant comparison in subsequent interviews, so the previous ones informed the subsequent ones resulted in the integration, defining and refining of the concepts and then the categories for relevance and fit.

Glaser discusses the ideal equipment for sorting memos to enable writing up are index cards and the “kitchen table” (Glaser, 1992, p.189); he notes that it is only remotely possible that the researcher might make an illustration of their theory. In his 1998 text, Glaser still doubts the use of “computerization” (Glaser, 1998, p.186) in grounded theory. The researcher felt however that technological advances have more to offer now and mind mapping is used to illustrate “terms associated with ‘category’ ... and ‘concepts’” from Glaser and Strauss’ (1967)

and Glaser's (1978) work in Gibson and Hartman (2014, p.74, p.77) and therefore technology has been used creatively as appropriate. For examples, see Wordle™ illustrations for *isolation* on page 114 and for *separation* on page 115.

Whilst the researcher did make memos, the sorting she undertook included mind mapping which she found both useful and enjoyable in its creation of more ideas and links between data. It is the alternate and creative way this process considered the data which led to connections between codes and concepts. By "constantly scanning and repeating the data" Buzan (2013, p.230) notes a concept should meld well with the constant comparison tenet. Another coding activity which was particularly useful was to 'tag cloud' the *in vivo* codes through the platform Wordle™ to create a visual representation of the data. Experiences participants' concerns were reviewed as pictorial representations, enabling a creative but critical consideration of the conceptual framework within the qualitative study (Heimerl, Lohmann, Lange & Ertl, 2014). Having a recording of the participant speaking also offered the opportunity to review their immediacy and feelings; tape recording rather than words on a page or field notes can provide a reminder of the thinking time, pauses, laughter and irony that complement and add richness to the data under review.

Within the data was a constant reiteration of the themes of isolation, separation, feeling disconnected from the organisational that participants were loyal towards and of being treated as the 'guilty party' from the outset because they were 'not believed'. As every participant discussed these themes, this alerted the researcher to an emerging categories of *emotional reactions* and *feeling bullied back*. This helped to integrate a significant quantity of *in vivo* codes and data comments/codes and memos which in turn began to delimit the data, so the analysis became a more focused activity (Glaser, 1998; Gibson & Hartman, 2014).

This memoing continued during the subsequent interviews, data collection, the coding and analysis; it played an important part in capturing reflections on the participants' experiences as well as developing understanding of primary category concerns. The memos were particularly useful in reviewing how the impact of similar points in the organisational process and support mechanisms had been experienced by and impacted on the participants. Memos are the connection between the coding, analysis and writing, whereby they focus the researcher's concentration, embedding the researcher in the data itself in order to then write the grounded theory (Charmaz, 1999).

#### **4.5 Theoretical sampling – Section 4**

Theoretical sampling concerns the cataloguing of data in a logical and thoughtful manner, using earlier data and the researcher's analytical thinking, ability to appreciate the 'bigger picture' and "conceptual skills" (Glaser, 1992, p.11). O'Reilly et al. (2012) and Goulding (2002) viewed theoretical sampling as a continuing procedure where data collection and analysis give direction to the researcher so their focus is on the emerging theory as it actually emerges. Glaser (1978, p.157) noted this was the "direction by the emerging theory of its own further emergence". Through the process of bracketing (Tufford & Newman, 2010) the researcher used memoing to identify, acknowledge and then set aside any preconceptions (Glaser, 1992), assumptions (Charmaz, 2006) or presuppositions (Crotty, 1998) about the research in order not to force or inflict her own views on the data and emerging theory. Yeadon-Lee (2013, pp.42-43) argues that "it is not possible to bracket the researcher's own perceptions in the collection and analysis of data", whilst Glaser (1978, 1992) promotes that researchers to articulate and consciously consider their preconceptions as a research project begins. Glaser (2012) proposed that interviewing oneself will afford a critical and conscious-raising understanding of your own preconceptions (Glaser, personal communication, December 19, 16:58 GMT, 2012). The researcher became mindful of the need to be aware of her knowledge of the field and therefore any preconceptions which may arise as the research developed (Ahern, 1999; Rolls & Relf, 2006). Preconceptions were not a static position, but developed as more data was collected and theory emerged; as the researcher recollected her own experiences and then reflected at all stages during the research project, critically questioning and examining her own position in order that these did not taint the research.

The emergent/emerging concepts and categories were reviewed against the experience of participant by participant in order to compare and contrast against the original or initial themes. This in turn allowed the creation of an aide memoir checklist to be considered by the research prior to the following interview. This served as a prompt for the researcher to ask participants to consider their experiences; perhaps how the isolation or separation they mentioned marginalised them through the use of probing questions (Easterby-Smith et al., 2008; Robson, 2002).

## **4.6 Theoretical saturation – Section 5**

Theoretical saturation is achieved when new or additional data no longer provides new information, so it does not contribute further to the enhancement of the categories or the dimensions within them, nor does new data affect or alter the relationship of the category with other categories (Locke, 2001).

Strauss and Corbin (1998) and O'Reilly et al. (2012) considered theoretical saturation essential in order to verify a good grounded theory. However Glaser's (1998) expectation is that there will be a constant recurrence which will tie the codes, concepts and categories together in order to develop the grounded theory; in this study, this expectation was satisfied, despite the number of participants being limited. Binder and Edwards (2010) concur with this premise, noting that theoretical saturation is reached when the coding process evidences the behaviour or experience of the participants and no change in the codes or categories are required.

In each of the interviews every participant freely discussed their sense of isolation or separation as well as a continual theme around the presumption they were guilty by virtue of an allegation being raised. The repeated data and the continual comparison of the participant's concerns led the researcher believed that as every participant had discussed the (ultimate) core category that a level of theoretical saturation had been achieved. Despite this not necessarily meaning the study had found out everything there was to know about the participants' lived experiences, there were repeated concerns, codes and dimensions to acknowledge that some theoretical saturation was reached (Glaser, 1978).

Glaser (1978) acknowledged that the moment at which theoretical saturation will be realised will fluctuate, that no two studies must be the same; rather it is the researcher's ability to accept and be sufficiently patient to allow the theory to emerge from the data. This, Glaser determined, would in return offer a theory which would achieve the rigorous criteria for a "good grounded theory", namely one with "fit, work, relevance and modifiability" (Glaser, 1992, p.15).

## **4.7 Theoretical sensitivity – Section 6**

Theoretical sensitivity requires of the researcher both intuition and an “open mind” to consider what is “actually happening” (Glaser, 1978, p.2). Classical, Glaserian grounded theory has a clear proviso that the researcher must not only be ‘open’ to the data but must also not be caught up with preconceived notions at any point in the research, for fear of forcing the data to deliver a pre-existing outcome.

In contrast to Glaser (1978, 1992) not advocating even the lightest of immersion in literature for fear of developing preconceived ideas, theoretical sensitivity does call for insight and experience on the part of the researcher so they have an appreciation of the issues and themes. Goulding (2002) noted there must be theoretical sensitivity which is borne from a theoretical understanding of the phenomena being studied in order to bring about the development of new theory.

The researcher was able to begin to review literature through which extant models of theory could be related to the core category and the grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Glaser, 1978) particularly around the repeated theme of participants experiencing some form of dislocation from their organisation. This, coupled with her senior strategic and operational HR roles as well as her more recent academic work supported and extended her theoretical sensitivity. Fendt and Sachs (2008) argue effectually that it is in the researcher recognising and considering their own earlier experiences, involvement, practice and knowledge that true sensitivity is maximised; such experiences should “be viewed as an asset and not a liability” (Fendt & Sachs, 2008, p450).

## **4.8 Chapter synopsis**

This chapter reviewed the data analysis undertaken in this study; with an initial open theoretical coding, then *in vivo* coding, through to a delimiting constant comparison of data, the emergence of codes, sub categories, categories and the core category emerged. This comprehensive analytical framework supported the discussion of the grounded theory, theoretical sampling, saturation and sensitivity as the rationale for the development of the suite of categories and their dimensions.



The following chapter will consider the research findings, presenting the grounded theory *guilty until proven innocent* with a critical evaluation of the categories and sub categories which the core category comprises of.

# Chapter 5: Research findings

## 5.1 Chapter overview

This chapter presents the research findings in a series of five sections. The first is illustrated with a theoretical framework to show how the core category established itself through the categories. The second, third, fourth and fifth sections review the categories and their subcategories, following which a brief synopsis offers a chapter summary to finish the research findings chapter.

The overarching aim of this study was to critically evaluate the lived experience and organisational implications of being accused of being a workplace bully, from the perspective of the (alleged) perpetrator. Using a classical, Glaserian grounded theory methodology as outlined in Chapter 3, the grounded theory of *guilty until proven innocent* emerged from the fundamental research questions of 'What is the main concern of participants?' and 'How do they resolve their main concern or understand what is happening?' (Glaser, 1978). It is with these questions in mind that the researcher analysed the data, using the structured approach outlined in Chapter 4 to consider these questions; this in turn leads to the presentation of research findings which are germane to the participants and express their points of view and experiences.

## 5.2 The grounded theory: *guilty until proven innocent* - Section 1

The study sample comprised eight adults who were accused of being a bully within their workplaces. Three of the participants were male and five were female. One of the participants worked part-time and the rest were full-time workers; all were on permanent contracts of employment. Table 3 overleaf, demonstrates the participant profiles, illustrating their role, work sector and industry in which they worked and the relationship the (alleged) bully had with their accuser.

All but one participant had supervisory or leadership responsibilities, six were accused of workplace bullying by a member of their team; one other participant was accused by their line manager and another by a peer in their team. The researcher considered whether gender was an important characteristic and therefore whether to report these characteristics. Politics and gender are not the dimensions of this study, whereas the psychological and organisational

perspectives were. By bearing in mind the sensitivity of the information and importantly, the possibility of identification of the participant, it was decided therefore not to include this information.

Participant Number	Role	Work sector	Industry	Relationship with accuser
1	Team leader	Private	Finance	Line manager
2	Team manager	Public	Local Government	Line manager
3	Head of service	Voluntary	Healthcare	Line manager
4	Team member	Public	Research	Subordinate
5	Head of service	Public	Facilities management	Line manager
6	Senior leadership	Public	Education	Line manager
7	Team manager	Private	Finance	Line manager
8	Senior leadership	Public	Education	Peer

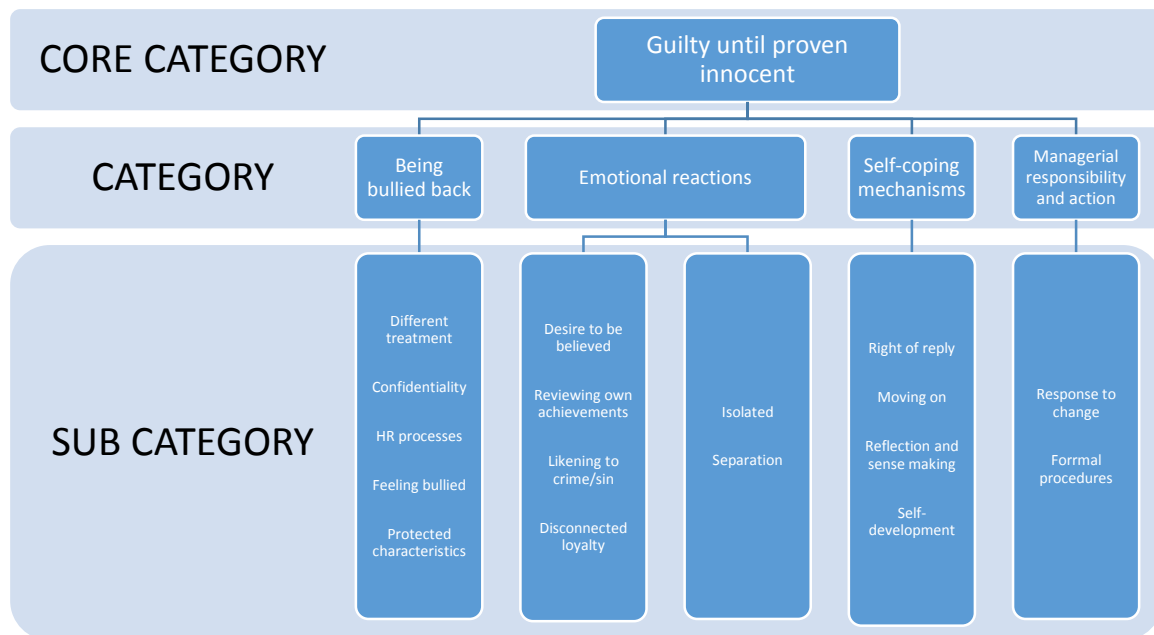
**Table 3: Participant profiles**

In unstructured, individual interviews, participants were asked 'tell me how it came about that you were accused of being a workplace bully?' as an initial starting question. The resulting transcripts were lengthy, ranging from 4,650 words to 20,010 words. The shortest interview took 80 minutes and the longest interview was two and a half hours duration.

The allegations made against the participants covered a wide range of bullying behaviours, including micro-managing, criticising work, setting unrealistic targets, refusing leave, excessive and intrusive supervision, browbeating, speaking in an inappropriate way and trying to elicit a resignation. These are forms of bullying behaviour acknowledged by ACAS (2010), CIPD (2005, 2015a) and (Rayner 2007) amongst others.

The research participants expressed how they journeyed through their experiences when they were subject of an allegation which accused them of being a workplace bully. From the interviews with participants and the analysis discussed earlier, the grounded theory *guilty until proven innocent* emerged and Figure 3 overleaf illustrates how the sub categories and

dimensions, categories and core category of the theoretical model are interwoven and connected.



**Figure 3: Interrelationship of categories in the development of the grounded theory, *guilty until proven innocent*.**

The discovery of the core category, *guilty until proven innocent* is linked to and supported by the four categories and their dimensions or sub-categories. Figure 3 illustrates how the relationships emerged from the data and were developed to create a construct that evidences the importance of each for the participants. To demonstrate the emergence and development of the grounded theory the participant's narratives have been used, supported with thematic memos and field notes. Participant's quotations are numerically labelled to identify the sequential order in which they were interviewed.

Every participant discussed how they had experienced *guilty until proven innocent* in some way; there was a recurring theme from the research data that the alleged bully was the one at fault, a presumption of guilt first, rather than an approach more in accord with the laws of natural justice where one is presumed innocent until proved otherwise. Participant 6 knew from the outset that "I absolutely had to prove my innocence".

Participant 5 explained how they dealt with being accused of being a workplace bully in manoeuvring through an HR process which presumed they were 'in the wrong' from the outset:

I was given a letter, then it was read to me, then I was told that I was a bully. The letter was an official notice of investigation, which led to feeling immediate isolation and with the instruction that it was a confidential matter, not to be discussed with anyone outside the room we were in, I was bereft of my usual workplace support. The presumption then was that I would get on with my job, meanwhile I would have to be investigated and respond to the claims. I was told how I had been a bully, but I was doing just what HR had told me to do because she [the alleging target] was in the formal stages of sickness management and I had done the action plan. HR had told me to get on and manage her, that I should have done it sooner and that I must adhere to the policy; I was really careful to explain to her that the policy set out how the sickness is dealt with. Then she says I am a bully, that I cause her workplace stress so she is on sickness leave again. I feel that I did the organisation's bidding and as a result, they left me high and dry when she didn't like it. What was the worst thing though was they acted like I must have done all the things she alleged, rather than think, hang on, he is a good manager, we use him to help us with HR matters and he is a 'good company man'. Oh no, they automatically think I am guilty and have to go through an aggressive and intimidating series of investigation interview and hearing and then just get a letter telling me it is all over, no case to answer to and you'll need to think carefully how you go about managing her sickness and her being in your team from now on!

Participant 1's experience describes how they felt they were *being bullied back* with illustrations from open and *in vivo* codes which explain the sub categories:

I think at the bottom of it all, end of the day, she [the alleged target] didn't agree with what was happening in my personal life, it clashed and offended her religion and beliefs, but it took HR four or five months to work it out and I was broken by this point. Perhaps without the stress of what she'd caused me, I might have saved my marriage which was imploding; funny really because that was what she'd got all offended about in the first place!

When considering their *emotional reactions*, Participant 2 explained how isolated they felt and then considers their *right of reply*:

I felt removed from everything; I didn't know who had been involved in the allegations or who had said what... I had nowhere to turn, no one to ask for help... Even the HR policy didn't say what support I could get, just that there would be an investigation so I guessed that would be the only time anyone would listen to me.

Participants discussed the lack of organisational support resulted in them needing to support themselves and as a result they developed their own *self-coping mechanisms*, which included thoughts around *moving on*, "immediate thought – should I resign?" (Participant 6) and "I put a protection around myself" (Participant 4).

Finally, in the category *managerial responsibility and action*, repeated instances of the formal processes or organisational change that was underway illustrated Participant 2's narrative:

We were all in the middle of organisational change; it had been going on for months and it still had months and months and months to go. The union were no help, they kept blocking things so they got more and more delayed. Everyone was under pressure then the announcement came out that some jobs were going to be cut out and her job had gone and she would have to fight for another one. She didn't like that.

It can be seen that in understanding the participant's experiences at each of the category levels, evidenced through the sub categories, their core concern and the core category are realised.

### **5.3 Category: Being bullied back – Section 2**

Participants described how they had been subject to different bullying behaviours which were categorised as *being bullied back*; from either their organisation in dealing with the allegation and/or from the accuser themselves. Largely this came from the *different treatment* the alleged bully received and there is a high level of interrelatedness within the subcategories. This sub category of *different treatment* included the lack of support or inappropriate support that the participants had received. This was interwoven with issues they had experienced around *confidentiality*, the *HR processes* that came into play and inherent in this was the understanding from the participants that they were then *feeling bullied* as a result. An underlying concern that participants held was with personal, *protected characteristics* and they queried whether it was this that made them more vulnerable to receive, or more likely to be the subject of an allegation of workplace bullying.

#### **5.3.1 Different treatment**

All participants discussed the lack of support and different treatment at all levels and stages of the process of being accused of being a workplace bully. Invariably, the participants reported, limited or non-existent support and dissatisfactory treatment, whilst the opposite was offered to the claimants. Participants expressed this lack of support and inferior treatment resulted in them feeling they were also on the receiving end of bullying treatment.

Participant 7 discussed how the organisational support they had initially had was withdrawn when the allegation of bullying was made, whilst they were investigating potential misconduct matters. In undertaking the initial fact finding interview with a member of staff and as a new manager it was appropriate to check-in with their own line manager, which happened regularly and confirmed that they were taking appropriate and necessary action, which the senior manager endorsed. In recognising they were new to the team, Participant 7 noted that:

I suppose it is difficult for the staff in a way when they have been unsupervised and unmanaged, that all of a sudden, well actually here is a reminder of our rules and processes.... [Later on] people who knew [claimant] said that she did take the Mickey with what she was doing, some people did know she did leave a lot of work uncompleted which others had to pick up and that she wasn't doing her job right.

The manager who Participant 7 had been referring to "changed tracks" when the allegations were made; Participant 7 explains their manager's reactions and behaviours:

It was like, "Oh, actually we didn't expect this to happen" sort of thing "I am going to segment myself from it a bit." I think in my manager's mind she might be thinking "Oh, what have I been telling [participant] to do wasn't actually right" so I think there was that bit of insecurity from her point as well... and with that my manager almost took a back seat if you like and changed direction... support was very limited at that time.

Participant 6 explained that the senior leaders in the organisation wouldn't talk to them, there was no one for them to seek support from within the organisation and with the (perceived) stigma attached to being labelled a bully, seeking support from family or friends was not an option. For Participant 6's accuser though, there was much support:

I mean, he had the ear of the [internal senior leaders] he had the ear of the [external senior leaders] if he asked for a hearing, that meeting was set up and heard, yes, absolutely.... If someone is accused of bullying then well they are accused of that and it needs to be dealt with, hence the [senior leaders] ran into the corner quietly and I never got much communication and that's how it is really.

Participants discussed the support programmes that were available in their organisations, but noted that these were not available, appropriate or offered to them. Participant 8 explained "There is a dignity at work advisor there for the bullied though" and Participant 7 was aware of an employee assistance programme (EAP) but noted "there is the EAP but no one said to me that I could use them..... Don't know if I would have wanted to anyway".

Participant 5 felt the support they would ordinarily get from their line manager was no longer available, "my line manager was investigating the allegations and although offered support it seemed well intention but removed my only option".

### **5.3.2 Confidentiality**

Participants discussed how they felt undermined and vulnerable due to the different expectations their organisation had on the matter of confidentiality. Seemingly, once the allegation had been put to the alleged bully, they understood they were now not to discuss the matter, that the process was confidential and to breach this had severe sanctions. Participant 3 explained that it was the disparity in the expectations of both parties that was striking and unfair:

All these allegations had been made and I couldn't say a word, as much as I wanted to, I couldn't say anything and he was free... "Oh, I've been bullied today by me [the participant]" to all of his colleagues, he just announced it!

Participant 2 echoed these sentiments, noting that the accuser had been "drumming up trade" and contacting people to ask them to join in the "class action" they were planning on taking. The alleged bully on the other hand "had no vestige of personal privacy left" (Participant 2) as a result. Participant 1 was also expected to maintain confidentiality, despite the organisation not doing so, they explained:

I had been told that it was all in confidence and that if I did try to talk to [accuser] about it, then I would be facing an even more serious charge of victimisation on top of everything else... Then when I got to the second investigation they said they had taken 26 formal statements in addition to mine, they had even been to the recruitment agency we used and asked them – like how confidential was anything after that!

It was made clear to the (alleged) bully that they were not expected to discuss or disclose details of the allegation or the incidents with their colleagues, therefore treating the situation in confidence. However it became evident from the participants that their accuser appeared not to be as bound by the same expectations in terms of confidentiality despite them still being alleged bullies at this stage.

This restriction in terms of confidentiality results in the removal of friends and colleagues as a potential support mechanism and emerged as a concern for all participants.



### 5.3.3 HR processes

There was a wide range of concerns and criticisms about the role the HR function and the organisational HR policies, procedures and processes. Three participants were senior managerial staff who, despite having investigated grievances and allegations before, were not aware of how the process or policy would affect or support them. Participant 5 explained they were not aware of what the policy said or what guidance it offered; they were “not even clear where it is.” Participant 3 explained that the policy is written from the point of view of the person being bullied, “There is nothing in there, I guess, about if you are accused of bullying”. When asked if the organisation’s bullying related policy discussed privacy or confidentiality, Participant 6 replied “no, I don’t think so, I understood that certainly that it wasn’t for me to talk about with anyone; that would have been completely improper”.

The application of the organisational policy was occasionally at odds with the advice or actions taken, which participants found disconcerting. Participant 2 was advised:

That there was no case to answer, that there were formal conduct issues that would be put to the accuser, but the bullying policy stated that ‘if a claim is vexatious or frivolous, unwarranted or bigoted’ (or something like that) then the claimant would be dealt with through the misconduct policies and this never happened.

Participant 3 noted that their organisational policy was “short on support for the alleged bully” whilst Participants 1, 2, 4 and 8 felt that although their respective policies did discuss how vexatious claims would be handled, this had not happened and that counter-grievances would not be accepted by the HR functions. Participant 6 did discuss how they believed they had an allegation to make against their accuser, for bringing malicious and false allegations, but that in reality, progressing this would have proved difficult, they explained:

I was always aware that I could, no one had gone through it with me but I knew I could bring a counter grievance, a counter allegation of my own. I didn’t see how that would be... I felt it would look just look tit for tat and I didn’t see how it was going to help bring a resolution and I always knew that one of the things was that she might come back and how was that going to help with that. If I’d have brought a counter allegation like that it would have been... I just thought as well the potential divisiveness amongst the staff. It was bad enough that she had brought the grievance against me, grievances being so serious, for me to then bring one against her on the basis that she’d brought one against me, why would you want your staff to see that kind of conduct?

Participant 5 discussed how they felt the HR function needed to “wise up”; it is too easy they thought to make a grievance about bullying:

Bullying, I think as a term, it's sort of got a power but it's also very easy for staff or for people generally in society to latch on to with very little implications for them. It is an accusation that is easy to throw at people from a distance and then sort of stand back and not justify, but the word can stick. You need no evidence, you don't have to think about how it will be for the other party, it is so easy, you just say I am the victim and you get believed, you get lots of attention and support.... It is so wrong, because there are genuine really awful cases which merit investigation and dealing with, but really, everyone's been bullied these days, you've just got to be the first one to get to HR and that's it – you're onto a winner!

Other participants echoed the theme of the ‘first to HR is a victim’, particularly when there was a breakdown in the working relationship between the two parties and there was evidence of bullying behaviours on both sides. Participant 4 acknowledged that there was a poor working relationship between themselves and the claimant, but the issues were on both sides, both believed the other to be a bully, the other person made the first claim though. When they contacted HR to try to explain this, they were told not to make a counter-claim, as this would spiral, “you'll report her for bullying and she'll report you for bullying and you'll report her and it will go on and on.”

Participant 8 noted that they had tried to resolve things in a calm and constructive way, but the person bullying them went to HR and suddenly the bullied found they were the perpetrator rather than the victim. Furthermore, when they sought assistance from their senior manager they were told it was just something they would have to manage. For Participant 3 it was important that more questions should be asked about an allegation, so it is not simply taken as being true from the outset; “What is going on with you? Were you bullied? What is bullying to you? What do you mean you were bullied? What part did you play in this, because there must have been one?” Participant 3 also noted that a claim is now almost routine, as a manager of a member of staff whose probation period had been extended and had also been warned for inappropriate and discriminatory language:

I suppose I am saying that I knew it would happen I guess, so it wasn't a shock really. I think it can quite literally ruin lives and that is not okay and it takes from the fact that when somebody really is being bullied it is not taken seriously and that other side of it where people can feel so bloody damaged going through that. Sadly, it's going to be a while and it's only the start of it.

The investigations were accusatorial for some participants and they felt this in itself was procedural or organisational bullying. Participant 5 noted they found it “adversarial” and they could only answer the investigator’s questions, not ask their own, in an internally managed investigation. There is overlap here with the participant not being able to exercise their *right of reply* as the questioning limited their being able to explain as fully as they may have liked. Participant 4 felt bullied by the investigator who had advised the participant must be “objective... stand back and try to be objective” which was difficult for them to reconcile when they explained “but bullying is subjective and it involves feelings. I told her that she had upset me and that she had caused distress but she still continued.”

By contrast, Participant 6 discussed that although they similarly found the process to be “adversarial”, they explained:

The context of it is adversarial, I think that is the important thing, the lady that did it [investigator] was lovely in her manner and in the way she went about it, that was absolutely fine but you know why it is happening and you know what the potential outcomes are. It is even though the investigator is not doing it in an adversarial way at all, their job is to get to the truth isn't it?

For Participant 1 it was the expectation that they could be given the accusations in the morning and attend a formal interview in the afternoon where she was “asked for reaction to her [the claimant’s] accusations.” Some four or five months later there was another interview and the investigator asked “tell me why one or two people really don’t like you and the rest seem to think you’re the best thing since sliced bread?”

All the participants discussed the very long time they felt the investigation and procedure took, Participant 2 said it “felt like forever” and Participant 3 noted “it took seven months and it was tortuous”.

Participant 5 had approved of the organisation’s internal choice of investigator, but after the formal bullying related processes were concluded, the investigator took over the absence management of the claimant. This cast a shadow of doubt over the appropriateness and independence of the investigator.

### 5.3.4 Feeling bullied

The participants described what they considered to be the bullying treatment they received which was consistent with the behaviours identified in the accusations and recognised by ACAS (2010), CIPD (2005, 2015a) and (Rayner 2007). These included threatened violence, marginalisation, sarcasm, being subject to false allegations, personal insults, fault finding and unwarranted criticism. Again, the participants' dialogues weaved through the subcategories within the category and this signposted the emergence and then further development of the social processes which affected and impacted on the alleged bullies.

Participant 8 talked about how they had not been able to fulfil their role when they were excluded from team meetings "where decisions were made" that were part of their responsibility and their objectives. At the same time, they were aware that their objectives were increased beyond that of fellow workers and believed it was due to the fact that their manager believed the accuser despite no investigation taking place:

I thought part of the dignity at work is that your achievements are acknowledged and respected and I felt I was being disrespected and unacknowledged... I met or exceed all the targets that she set me last year and she set me bloody massive targets, really massive targets (Participant 8).

For Participant 6, this was also particularly pertinent and they explained:

I had declined her [the participant's] request for early retirement and the result was she made a claim against me for bullying, to make it personal rather than about the organisation saying no to her. She was bullying me too by making it about me.... The organisation's policy bullies you; you can't have any support, you can't talk to anyone about it, it is confidential and yet she is going round getting anyone and everyone to listen...

One participant received telephone calls at his workplace from the partner of his accuser and although the organisation were aware of this, no action was taken to prevent it or to protect him; the bullying came from the accuser, her partner, their manager and by the organisation:

Between all that time [during the investigation] her husband used to call work and say that he was going to get me and that he was going to find me and find out who I am but this is a person who has been in prison with previous behavioural issues so not really the ideal situation. He was in contact with my manager and people, he

was basically reaffirming what she was saying, saying "Oh, he's a bully and he picks on women", this, that and the other (Participant 7).

### **5.3.5 Protected characteristics**

During interviews several participants reflected or questioned whether the allegation would not have been made if they were not 'different' from the accuser. Despite some exploring this in more detail than others, it was certainly a concern for Participant 3 who was quite sure that if he had been an Arian, white, 6' tall, heterosexual man "of a certain age", the claim may not have come about. Participant 3 explained how they had been required to deal with the accuser's inappropriate behaviour in relation to a protected characteristic:

Dare I say small man syndrome perhaps but I am not six foot, I don't have a South East of England accent and I think some people have issues with that, I really do think some people have issues with that. It's interesting, this guy [accuser] that came into post that I was dealing with constantly referred to my age, where I had to say to him actually, that is a personal characteristic, you need not be saying that, you need to be very careful. I know you are actually joking but actually you've said it a few times now you need to stop it.

Participant 1 had felt supported by friend/colleagues at work who knew about the depression and anxiety they were experiencing, although it was not "public knowledge" everyone in the team knew they were having a "dreadful time at home":

The depression was so bad that I went into hospital at one point, but really work was my lifeline because it got me away from home..... She [accuser] just wasn't in my circle of confidants really, she wasn't excluded; it was just that if he phoned up [estranged partner] and gave me a load of hassle, she [accuser] wasn't the one I would turn to for some support or a hug. I still think now that she did it because she thought I didn't give her enough attention and she knew that I wasn't well...

Participant 4 believed that her ethnicity played a part in the allegations in that they enjoyed wearing traditional and bright coloured clothing rather than "the same things to work every day". This developed further when the allegation called into question their sexuality when the accuser wondered if the (alleged) bully "might be gay".

One participant who had two protected characteristics did not consider they may have played a part in the allegations being made, three participants did not discuss or allude to having a protected characteristic but for Participant 8, there was a fundamental importance attached to the unfair treatment and lack of support they received. Following a health related absence

for a medical condition which both participant and their physician considered satisfied the criteria to be disability-related, the participant was advised their attendance was unsatisfactory despite having been supported during earlier and longer periods of absence due to the same ill health.

#### **5.4 Category: Emotional reactions – Section 3**

Discussions with all the participants explored their *emotional reactions* to the allegation and the experience of being accused of workplace bullying. Consistent themes emerged with an overarching need to be heard and a *desire to be believed*. In essence the participants wanted their organisation to recognise them as a person rather than an almost immediate determination that as they were the accused and therefore they were guilty of something. Participants wanted the researcher to understand their work context, who they were in their workplace, the type of colleague and manager they considered themselves to be and the previous roles they had held.

Of particular note were the emerging concepts of feeling distanced from the organisation and participants described this as being *isolated*, acknowledging their sense of *separation*. During this time however, the participants remained loyal to their organisation, supporting its aims and objectives, maintaining good reputational responsibility towards it, but noting that the organisation was not treating them in a way that they treated it, thus exhibiting a *disconnected loyalty*. The sub categories of *isolated* and *separation* were key factors continually discussed by all participants.

##### **5.4.1 Desire to be believed**

The need to be heard, to be listened to, to be believed (at least at the outset) was a clear message from the participants and ties in with the themes of being treated as the 'guilty party' from the outset. As participants continued to discuss how they were not believed they explained that there would always be a stigma attached to having been accused, regardless of the eventual outcome and this had a distressing impact. Participant 6 started their interview with the researcher by explaining that although the research was focusing on the experience of the alleged bully, despite the participant's 'guilt or innocence' that it was a fundamental point for them, they explained:

I can entirely understand from your researcher's point of view that you are not interested in innocence or guilt but I am sure it makes a difference to the people that you are speaking to in terms of research. The difficult thing to handle from my point of view with it all, one of the things that I would want to make clear is the issue that she was bringing up and the issue of bullying that she was bringing up, I don't think she wanted it resolving in any other way other than it being part of her trying to get a financial settlement... I did feel like I was under this horrible cloud of suspicion and accusation and I wasn't saying anything about it and wouldn't and couldn't and actually that very silence might be taken to admitting it because what I wasn't saying is "well, that's not so".

Participant 3 explained:

It's a bit when you are in court and the jury have to ignore that remark, well you've heard it, you can't 'un-hear' something... and there is still that thing, no smoke without fire, oh well, she was difficult with me once, well she walked in front of you on the stairs, there is some bloody silly thing.

The participants also discussed how the opportunity to explain their own experience, their perception and their 'side of the story' had been therapeutic for them; the researcher noted that there was a repeated theme of participants still needing or wanting to profess their innocence, to "prove and re-prove" (Participant 3) that they were not guilty of what they were accused of. Participant 5 wrote to the researcher after the interview to express thanks for giving them an opportunity to talk in an environment which was not judgemental or where they needed to be on the defensive. Participant 3 explained how the research interview had been cathartic and how the opportunity to talk to someone who simply accepted what was being said:

When we started [the interview] I wanted to stop, I found it really difficult, I just wanted to stop and leave. I was finding it really difficult, when we first started talking. I just thought this is too painful, I don't want to touch it...

I feel much better now I have got it out and I feel like I have just spilled it all but so much has happened, absolutely so much as happened and you've just listened and heard me and I don't know if it even makes sense...

Participant 1 explained how the allegation was so at odds with the reality of the circumstances and how it was illogical that an allegation could even have been made; the allegation was that Participant 1 had "picked on her, criticised the quality of her work, that in several conversations she had overheard thought [the participant] offensive, degrading or humiliating". Participant 1 on the other hand recorded in their diary:

I have done nothing but help this woman. When her mother became ill I arranged special leave for her; I found out info about her mother's illness and shared it with her. At Christmas she had the opportunity to go to visit family on the Isle of Man and I went to great lengths to get her an extra three days annual leave at a time when we were going to be rushed off our feet. The [organisation] however doesn't want to consider these things, or get her to talk about it informally, they will follow their 'correct and laid down procedures' and instigate an investigation.... 7 months later...

Participant 2 felt the allegation was career ending, explaining "they say there is no smoke without fire and if people think this about me life is over, career is over".

### **5.4.2 Reviewing own achievements**

The participants all wanted to explain they were effective organisational team members, who met targets, achieved objectives and effectively managed teams had received high praise before, all of which had been recognised by their organisation. Participant 8 discussed how their unique skill-set and industry acknowledged results were so productive and valuable that they had been headhunted to join the team they were now with; as a talented high achiever, the remuneration and wider reward package were significantly above the market average.

Participant 2 explained:

There was a restructuring programme underway, but the organisation had confirmed my place in the new structure and then the pay grade would be increased; this was after conclusion of the bullying allegations investigation and outcome, indicating how I remained a valuable asset for the organisation.

For Participant 6 earlier relationships with colleagues from previous places of work were used to exemplify their managerial approach and skills:

I prided myself upon the relationships I'd had with staff in all the previous [organisations] I'd worked in. If anything, I would have thought probably one of the main ways in which staff who I've worked with and for and under me if you like in terms of hierarchy, would have said that I was a developer of people and was completely reasonable.

Three participants had achieved success with professional and academic qualification which they felt contributed to their being acknowledged as a credible 'voice' within their organisation. The participants felt that this was perceived as favouritism by their accusers as well as a reason for jealousy and mistrust.



### **5.4.3 Likening to crime/sin**

Participants explained that the allegation of being a bully and the label of 'bully' is distressing and it was likened to "being called a rapist or a racist... like an accusation of child abuse" (Participant 3) and Participant 4 repeated this theme, "a child molester, a rapist". Participant 1 considered it to be "career ending, life threatening", Participant 2 "like being a bigot or racist, sexist..." Participant 5 noted that "in a school playground a bully is known as being cruel, a coward; but in the workplace it is criminal, you're an ogre, evil". Participant 4 considered "it is so stigmatised, people would rather leave work because of being sick or anything rather than having to leave because you are a bully" and for Participant 6, it was "the worst thing imaginable... I felt like a criminal". Participant 1 explained:

I felt sick. I felt angry. I felt embarrassed. I felt frightened. I felt like the world would end and that I'd lose everything. And I'd be reduced to being jobless and homeless and it left me thinking I'd been a criminal or a murdered that's what gets investigated like I did... The future seemed to open up like a big black hole...

For Participant 7 the allegation made them "very anxious, questioning everything... done something very wrong – but what did I do wrong?" Whilst for Participant 8 the enormity of the allegation had been overwhelming and they explained they "wouldn't wish it on my worst enemy." Participant 2 developed this theme:

I could have eaten my own baby and been treated better. No laws for bullying but [that] didn't stop me from feeling like I'd broken one. And like a racist or sexist it is the thing that ends your career and reputation.

The common theme that emerged is the terminology used or label ascribed by participants was the worst thing they could think of being, even though different phrases and language were used, the consideration that being labelled a bully is seen as being as most repulsive. Participant 5 had added that the terms "ogre" and "evil" are personal labels about the bully rather than organisational ones and they felt they had been following the organisational policy rather than perusing a personal agenda.

### **5.4.4 Disconnected loyalty**

Despite the shock which participants experienced when they were told about the allegations for the first time, there continued to be a high level of loyalty and respect for their organisation. Participant 7, who was dealing with an issue of performance with a member of

staff who had been manipulating their results explains "I think the practice and processes within how my manager dealt with it was disappointing from the start but ultimately I'd never hold that against the [organisation]."

Participant 2 echoed the sentiment, noting:

I went home after they'd told me, but I was back the next day and the day after that... I might have wanted to curl up and die, but I had a job to do, meetings I had committed to attending and I made sure I was there every day, doing the best job I could, just as I always had done.

Participant 8 linked the theme of disconnected loyalty to their feelings of isolation and loneliness:

It is lonely here, it is lonely. I didn't expect it to be lonely, the way that it is and I didn't expect to feel as excluded as I do. I have fantastic relationship with other staff that is what keeps me going really, with [service users] and staff, really, really, good relationships. I think I do my job really, really well.

Participants described their organisation's expectations that they would continue with their 'day job' with a consistent theme that the organisation was perhaps not aware of the impact of the allegation and the effect it had upon them. Participant 2 explained there was an expectation they would simply go about their morning's business and continue to manage their team/function:

I had been told about the allegation and was really in a state of shock; I was told to go and prepare myself for a meeting with the manager who had been present when I was told... I can't remember exactly, but something like "and don't forget that you've got the [organisational] meeting in 20 minutes, you need to be fully prepared for that as we have to give a good presentation".

Participant 6 explained how it took three full days to review the claim made against them and reply to each of the points the accused had made, this was done during their holiday following instructions to "carry on, carry on doing the work" from their organisation. Participant 6 felt they had to carry on in order to demonstrate commitment and that if they were not loyal then this would be further insinuation of their guilt before matters were even investigated. Participant 3 meanwhile was leading the re-tendering exercise which was crucial to the organisation's work and if unsuccessful would bring about redundancies. Participant 3 felt there was no appreciation that the future success of the organisation was with a person who had been accused of being a bully and was trying to deliver against a backdrop of personal

distress, isolation and loneliness with none of their senior colleagues prepared to discuss work at all.

### 5.4.5 Isolated

All participants discussed how they felt both *isolated* through a *separation* from the organisation and initially these sub categories of were a single dimension. The researcher developed field notes which explored these themes to understand more about their impact on the participants and what this contributed to the category of *emotional reactions*. Emerging from the data however, was a distinction between the two in that feelings of being *isolated* were created by the organisation and *separation* by the participant themselves and whilst there are the expected overlap within the dimensions, the two factors were substantially sufficient to form separate sub categories. *Separation* is discussed in Section 5.4.5.

In analysing how the sub category of *isolated* emerged, the researcher took a holistic view of all the *in vivo* codes from all the interviews and created a Wordle™ to give a pictorial representation of the data. In creating the Wordle™, the researcher generated concepts from the *in vivo* codes, field notes and emerging concepts. For example, in considering “it is lonely here...” within an organisation of 1000+ staff and 15000+ service users, the concept emerging suggested that for some it would not be possible to be lonely with so many people present, but there was an ‘aloneness’ for that participant at that time. Table 4 below provides details of some of the *in vivo* coding used and the Wordle™ is presented in Figure 4 overleaf.

<b><i>In vivo</i> coding for the sub category isolated</b>		
Isolated	Abandoned	Ostracised
Alone	Distanced	A dark place
Put in an office by myself, a really big office and it was really cold	Both stood by the photocopier but I wasn’t even there as far as they were concerned	It is lonely here, it is lonely. I didn’t expect it to be lonely

**Table 4: *In vivo* coding for the sub category *isolated***



**Figure 4: Wordle™ representation of sub category *isolated***

Participant 3 explained their sense of acute isolation came from both internal and external senior leaders, "They ran into a corner and I never got much communication really; they isolated me, I think they thought "we don't want to be too close to [Participant]". Participant 5 noted that on receipt of the letter advising them of the allegation they felt an "immediate isolation, bereft of usual workplace support". Participant 3 explained how they felt isolated, "I was ostracised... my second line manager said "Look, I can't help you, she's accused you of bullying and so have other people".

#### **5.4.6 Separation**

Continuing the analytical approach and the theme from Section 5.4.4 *isolated*, the sub category of separation was similarly explored using the *in vivo* codes and in pictorial representation as well as further illumination from the participants' experiences. Table 5 overleaf provides details of some of the *in vivo* coding used and the Wordle™ is presented in Figure 5 overleaf.

<i><b>In vivo coding for the sub category separated</b></i>		
Separated	Misunderstanding	Disconnection
Investigation	Detached myself	Disengaged
Discrimination	Under scrutiny	Remote

**Table 5: *In vivo* coding for the sub category separation**

separation



**Figure 5: Wordle™ representation of the sub category separation**

Participant 1 explained their feelings:

I went through the full gamut of emotions; I was hurt, felt wounded, felt sick, felt angry, embarrassed, frightened. Some of the accusations were just lies and they could be proved as such... I needed to withdraw from it all and be detached.

Participants also noted that the shock they experienced when they were told about the allegation played a part in them separating themselves, Participant 8 noted that being told of the allegation it “takes your breath away”, a point which Participant 2 also experienced:

I was taken into the board room where they said there has been an allegation made against you... I couldn’t breathe and I thought like I was cast in stone as I sat

there... it was all a blur, because then they said, "you can go now" I wasn't sure if I was real or not or if I wanted to go to the bathroom or not, or if I was going to be sick or if I was going to laugh... actually, I didn't even know if I was still breathing... I think that is what is called shock. And from that point, I just disconnected and went to sit in my office to keep remote from it all and it was cold but I wanted to be separate and safe...

For both Participants 2 and 8 the results of this shock were to sequester themselves away, to detach from the people around them for fear that being united with others would have a detrimental effect or be a potential reason that further complaint be levied at them.

All participants discussed both being *isolated* and shared feelings of *separation* although they had not distinguished the two factors. It was evident though that the participants experienced being *isolated* from the organisation and then their own almost self-protection by way of *separation* which, in some circumstances was to ensure they were not accused of breaching the confidentiality expectations which are discussed in Section 5.3.2.

## **5.5 Category: Self-coping mechanisms – Section 4**

Participants wanted the researcher to understand their work context, who they were in their workplace, the type of colleague and manager they considered themselves and the previous roles they had held. It seemed this research gave an opportunity for participants to have a *right of reply* whereby participants could explain themselves and respond to the specific allegations made against them. Participants also wanted to talk about how their managerial dealings with their accuser was necessary and seemed to be justifying their actions. It was through this justification that it became apparent that there was a need (even now in talking to a researcher) for the participant to feel heard, that it was significantly important they feel they had a *right of reply* and that developing their own coping mechanisms allowed them to satisfy this need in some way as organisational ones were lacking. These self-coping mechanisms were coded as *right of reply*, *moving on*, *reflection and sense making* and *self-development*.

### **5.5.1 Right of reply**

Some participants explained that preparing for the investigation and writing their reply to the allegations had actually been helpful for them. Participant 5 refer to this as having been "cathartic" and Participant 8 added to this, explaining that they continue to keep a running log which explains how the upward bullying is progressing and setting out the 'true' version

of events should a further allegation, claim or counter-claim be made at some point in the future. When a participant believed they had not been afforded their right of reply and were unable to explain themselves fully, they were distressed and felt that 'closure' could not be achieved. Participant 3 explained that there was a huge dossier of complaints about their management, their leadership and them as a person, but they had not been allowed to read it, they added:

It felt like I had no right to reply, but then I didn't know what I was replying to, I didn't know what had been said or what wasn't said... I have seen the twenty eight page summary and I have literally answered every single thing that [the accuser] accused me of and I will give you a very quick example...

Participant 6 noted that it had been important to refute each point made against them and that this was a significant task:

I spent three days basically writing it up. That was very cathartic and even though it took a long time, going through and fact checking and seeing that actually this is a load of tosh and there was no way that any credible person could have interpreted it the way she had if they had been there and part of it and seen it, so that did make me feel better. I think it went to about fifteen pages, this one piece of writing I did but I just felt it was necessary because I knew that it was going to be investigated obviously and that I was going to need to give my account of it at some stage and I thought I am going to have it clear... I absolutely had to prove my innocence.

Participant 4's organisation would not disclose the details of the allegations, so they resorted to a subject access request under the Data Protection Act 1988 in order to see the charges.

Mediation was offered to two of the participants after the investigations had concluded. Whilst both acknowledged this may have been helpful had it been provided at the earliest possible juncture it was not offered until after the hearing and as a result, the offer was not progressed and mediation did not take place. Two participants received counselling after the experience and a third knew mediation was available but did not pursue it. Participant 1 explained "the [organisation] are paying for me to see a counsellor, to try and work through the way I am feeling right now" and that this was proving useful although they really wanted answers from the accuser, rather than the counsellor.

### 5.5.2 Moving on

Participants discussed elements of '*moving on*' or seeking closure with both positive and negative inferences, but central to this sub category was how the organisation had shared information with the alleged bully. Participant 8 would accept a voluntary severance package and was prepared to be 'bumped' (an HR expression for offering to take another colleague's voluntary or compulsory severance so they can stay and the 'bumper' can leave) in order to leave the organisation. Other participants discussed a more determined way forward and Participant 2 explained:

The outcome was that there had been no bullying at all, that the allegation had been nefarious, if anything it was accepted that the bullying had been the other way because there was acknowledgement that their behaviour with the nasty talk and gossip about me was way out of order. That said though, I was 'rewarded' with an informal warning because I must have said something to upset someone! So, I waited the six months, then applied for another job, which I got and a four figure pay rise to go with it – there, that's how you move on!

A particularly significant report (of PhD thesis length) had been written about the (alleged) bullying by Participant 3's accuser, who never had sight of the document; the participant wondered "how you could expect closure really when you were not sure if there were things still outstanding or more that had not yet been said". Furthermore, participant 2 noted:

Part of me would like to sit and have a conversation with [the accuser] and say "look, what was that all about, was it about me personally, was it about the work, was it about you, are you not well?" ... I don't know... I could torture myself forever trying to get answers and I think, you know what, it needs to go behind me now.

Participant 6 explained that they had had immediate thoughts about *moving on*, asking themselves:

It made me think about resigning, quite definitely and also just thinking actually do I need to move and go elsewhere anyway and not actually resigning, finding another post? I think one of the reasons for that is because it is such a shock.

However, for Participant 6 once the shock had subsided and later when matters were concluded the closure finally came when after a period of them being "overly careful and sort of walking on egg shells around her in a way that wasn't natural", the accuser exited the organisation.



Participant 4 explained part of their *moving on* was the protection they had built up around themselves in that they had chosen not to have friends at work now.

### 5.5.3 Reflection and sense-making

All the participants discussed how they had reflected on their experience and this was in the main for their organisation's benefit and their own management practice.

Participant 4 reflected that their practice had changed, explaining:

I was thinking the other day that circumstances are better now... they [the accuser] said I was unpredictable... this changed my practice. I stick to the rules and follow the [organisation's] process and procedure; I am very clear and need to stick to these.

Participant 6 explained that their reflection had helped them to make sense of what had happened and led them to surmise that:

Workplace bullying is too easy an accusation to throw and there is a lack of understanding of the devastation it can cause. It has been a learning curve and I've been better able to support a member of my staff who has to give a statement as a witness as a result of my own experiences. There is a gap for support for all staff, but particularly senior leaders and I'm not sure how that gets filled...

Part of Participant 1's *reflection and sense making* included keeping a diary of her experience which recorded her feelings that there were no 'winners' or 'losers' when the accuser resigned from the organisation after the allegation was dismissed:

People say to me "you must be thrilled she's leaving and the boss has said me, him and [a co-accused] will go out for lunch as we're due a treat... But I don't feel elated or secretly thrilled or even glad... not for me and not for her. I must be weird, after all she's done I should be wanting to stand on the doorstep and wave goodbye to her with a big cheesy grin on my face. But I just feel sad. A bit for her and a bit for me. I think in a way she did win; I never got the opportunity to prove I could manage her; I wanted her performance to improve and I wanted her to be part of our team...

What Participant 5 explained was there seemed to be a continual dialogue of bullying everywhere, pointing out it "seems like everyone's been bullied these days" with continual barrage in the press, in magazines, television and that there are victims created out of perpetrators by virtue of the participant's need to escape from a different formal process they

are in. A short time after their interview, Participant 5 sent the researcher a page from a calendar with a short note that said "this appeared on my Dilbert calendar, highly appropriate!" (The diary page is presented in Appendix 6). The page reflects the theme that a well-intentioned, supportive managerial approach to a member of staff who has an agenda will look to create evidence of bullying when perhaps there is none.

Participants had reflected on the allegations that had been made about them, particularly where they had been undertaking formal management procedures with the accuser. There was an acknowledgement that where an outcome of the formal procedure could result in a detriment to the accuser it was seen by them as a negative act perpetrated by their accused, despite the action stemming from an organisational rather than personal policy and procedure.

#### **5.5.4 Self-development**

Participants demonstrated how their personal self-development had progressed since the allegation and this was positive, despite it taking some time to occur. Participant 4 explained:

It was a long wait until I could go back and review it... I arranged training myself with [in-house trainer] on assertiveness and when I first started I was so upset about the bullying, the aftermath, it was like nothing had been sorted out, but then it was really helpful and it toughened me up.

For Participant 3, self-development focused on wanting to make their own and their organisation's practice better in the future, so they took to rewriting the HR bullying policies. "I got advice and guidance to rewrite the policy and I understand more about HR as a result."

Participant 1's self-development came about through the external counselling sessions their employer had paid for after the allegation and investigation had been concluded, they explained:

I knew more about who I was and certainly more about why I'd been so angry inside; I learned that I can't change those around me, they will be what they will be, but I can change what happens inside me, how I chose to approach things and what my attitude will be. The best thing about the counselling really was that it helped me work out that I am an okay person.

## **5.6 Category: Managerial responsibility and action – Section 5**

Participants all discussed moments in their professional working relationship with their accuser which emerged as the category *managerial responsibility and action* as this best described there being a moment or time when the participant rationalised the reasons for the allegations to be made against them. Again, these sub categories merged for some participants and there was overlap in the emergence, hence the need for the category to offer an umbrella descriptor to incorporate the *response to change and formal procedures*.

### **5.6.1 Response to change**

All participants felt they had a managerial responsibility which necessitated actions connected with wider organisational changes. There were similar experiences discussed by participants around the accuser's unpreparedness or unwillingness to adapt to the changes within their organisations. Participant 1 described how a new organisational bonus payment policy which was introduced prevented them from awarding a payment to some members of staff:

We had been work friends and sometimes been out on a social basis with the others in the team, but then I had to reduce her bonus because she just wasn't doing the 'sales'. It was the organisation that said no, not me, but she did think it was all my fault and this left me vulnerable really.

The theme of organisational change rang true for other participants and Participant 2 explained:

My [functional area] was being reviewed within the organisational restructuring and it needed to be because the reporting lines were not clear and we had more bosses than workers really. When some of the team knew they would be losing their job it was like all-out war really, with bitching, moaning, grumbling all taking precedence over the work. There needed to be better communication with people and at the end of the day, they sort of proved they were not the best of the team because they didn't want to work in the new style. I think to stop them being at risk [of redundancy] they put in the claim about bullying because they'd heard if you're pregnant you can't lose your job, so they thought this would do the same and so I was accused of bullying. Then I was told to not discuss it [the allegation] with them, but to get on and manage them too.

Participant 6 explained that they were a senior leadership team manager and inherited an existing team where a culture of bullying seemed prevalent. Determined to drive this out, they were keen to reassure the senior staff they were secure in post and that they were key

to the success going forward and that having them on board would result in a strong and admired leadership team, which delivered excellent results for their client user group. This, however did not come to pass and Participant 6 explained:

It was one of those occasions where the people you have inherited to work with weren't ever going to be willing to change. I still think that is unusual, I still think I was unfortunate from that point of view... I didn't change their jobs or anything like that, I was trying to get them on board with the changes that [the organisation] needed.

These participants perceived that they were put into an almost impossible situation; the organisational procedures were driving a process that had negative outcomes and consequences for the claimants.

### **5.6.2 Formal procedures**

In Section 4.3.3 HR processes, Participant 3's concerns that the allegation of them being a bully was expected were discussed; this widened the dimensions of the coding as it emerged that there was frequency of claimants who were in the throes of being managed through a non-bullying related formal organisational policy. These other policies included formal, disciplinary absence management, misconduct, retirement, extended probationary periods and performance management.

Participant 3 was one of several who felt that if the organisation or HR function were cognisant of the claimant being managed under another procedure or policy, then it really should act on this information or at least take it into account and keep it in mind. In some cases it was the HR function or more senior manager that had guided the participant in the first place on the need to take the formal action with a team member. Four participants discussed how the allegation came from a member of staff who they were already managing through a formal organisational policy, with one of these participants also preparing for a second formal investigation into the same worker. Another two participants discussed the formal process they were about to embark on with the accuser. This raised an interesting dimension as it is acknowledged that claimants can lodge a grievance and cite bullying as a measure to frustrate or slow down a formal procedure which they are being dealt under (Liefoghe & Mackenzie-Davey, 2001; McCarthy, Henderson, Sheehan & Barker, 2002). Table 6 overleaf notes the details:

Participant	Formal/pending	HR process/policy
1	Pending	Performance management and sickness
2	Pending	Misconduct
3	Pending Formal	Misconduct Extension of probation
5	Formal	Attendance/absence management
6	Formal	Early retirement request and absence management
7	Formal	Performance management and misconduct

**Table 6: Alleged bullies managing staff through formal organisational/HR processes**

Participant 1 discussed how they had been receiving complaints from customers about the disinterested, poor customer service provided by their accuser and in beginning to discuss this, the claimant had said that anybody and everybody on the team would “get a dose of it” should anyone want to try to manage her performance. Coupled with a poor sickness record, Participant 1 had been advised that they should begin to challenge this through the sickness policy and performance policy but the allegation of bullying seemed staged to contest the other formal processes commencing.

Participant 5 shared a similar story; they were managing the long term absence of a member of staff, when the worker wrote her allegation letter to the organisation, accusing Participant 5 of workplace bullying. The participant had been advised by the HR function to instigate the final/formal stages of the organisation’s procedure, to deal with the issue of absence in a forthright and positive manner, rather than “the more sensitive approach” Participant 5 thought they were taking. When the issue was tackled and the final/formal policy was embarked upon, the allegation of bullying was made and removed Participant 5 from the management of the process.

Participants 4 and 8 were both in the process of making informal allegations of bullying themselves when they were both accused of being the bully. These participants had both noted an informal approach to resolution was a procedural requirement within the context of their organisation’s formal policy and as a result, both had talked either to a line manager or the HR function within their organisation. Both participants were disappointed that this was not recognised during the ensuing processes, expressing concerns that it cannot simply be

sufficient that the first party to contact the HR function is automatically labelled the victim. Participant 4 explained:

It was better to be on the other side [i.e. be the one making the allegation], so I suppose there were those feelings of... it is kind of like with bullies and victims, it can be a grey area, it is not a case of a victim is an angel and a bully is a complete devil.

There were two participants who were not line managers of the claimant in their case; one was a peer and the other the line manager of the participant (upward bullying). For both, there were organisational processes and procedures running that had a negative impact on the accuser; as with other participants, the claimant could not level their complaint directly at the organisation, so their only avenue to do this was to make it a personal one and cite the person in the position of perceived power as the bully.

## **5.7 Chapter synopsis**

This chapter reviewed the research findings of the data in this study, discussing how the participants' experiences had been coded and categorised as the grounded theory *guilty until proven innocent* emerged.

In developing these categories the overarching aim of this study, to critically evaluate the lived experience and organisational implications of being accused of being a workplace bully, from the perspective of the alleged perpetrator was comprehensively explored. Using a classical, Glaserian grounded theory method the grounded theory of *guilty until proven innocent* considered the fundamental grounded theory questions of 'What is the main concern of participants?' and 'How do they resolve their main concern or understand what is happening?' (Glaser, 1978). The participants' main concerns, *being bullied back, emotional reactions, self-coping mechanisms* and *managerial responsibility and action* would be resolved by their need to be heard and understood in a way which allowed them to not be treated or by them experiencing *guilty until proven innocent*.

The following chapter offers a critical discussion of the research findings, comparing and contrasting the findings in the study with alleged bullies to that of the extant literature and other research.

# Chapter 6: Discussion

## 6.1 Chapter overview

This chapter offers a more detailed review of the extant literature and the research findings in a series of four sections, following the categories of the emerged theoretical model of the grounded theory *guilty until proven innocent*. Section five reviews this theoretical model against the grounded theory evaluation criteria (Glaser, 1978; Glaser & Strauss, 1967) to demonstrate the credibility of the theory. A brief synopsis concludes the discussions chapter. A copy of the model is presented in Appendix 7 for the reader's reference, these are:

Section 1 – Being bullied back

Section 2 – Emotional reactions

Section 3 – Self-coping mechanisms

Section 4 – Managerial responsibility and action

In developing a grounded theory, Glaser (1978, p.97) noted that it should “account for a pattern of behaviour which is relevant and problematic for those involved”. Accordingly, in discussing what the main concerns of the participants were, this chapter objectively explains the concepts of the theory, locating them in the traditions of wider academic literature and practitioner policy, procedure or process. The interrelatedness of the categories becomes clearer through the discussions as, for example, the definition of bullying and the HR processes caused *emotional reactions*, which resulted in self-evaluation for participants both of themselves but also of their accuser and the wider organisational context.

## 6.2 Being bullied back – Section 1

This section considers how the progress within the UK from the historical personnel function to the current HR models, positing how the transformation from a welfare focus to strategic business alignment may have influenced the phenomena and experience of workplace bullying. In considering how the HR policy and procedure impact on the experiences of the alleged bullies the section also raises the issue of protected characteristics and the challenges this adds in terms of accused and accuser of workplace bullying.

### **6.2.1 Developing HR structure and practice**

The history of the people function in organisations in the UK, from welfare to personnel to human resources (HR) has been charted by CIPD (2015c) from its inception in 1913 when the inaugural meeting of the Welfare Workers' Association took place in York. Often called 'welfare secretaries' (Evans, 1999) had roles that were similar to social workers (Barley & Kunda, 1992) and were charged with the protection of females in the workplace. This was considered to be vital not only in the moral sense, but also against a backdrop of harsh industrial settings that women and children were working in. From these initial purposes, personnel functions developed and, by 1945, specialist personnel management was enacting UK government labour demands; as a result the role was considered bureaucratic (CIPD, 2015c).

A Royal Commission, chaired by Lord Donovan (1968) reported that failings in negotiation and industrial relations were the result of organisations failing to acknowledge the role personnel functions and managers had was not simply one which concerned welfare. As a result, specialist roles designed to manage trade union and employee relations, welfare and recruitment etc. began to emerge (CIPD, 2015c). By the late 1980s the American term 'human resource' was introduced in the UK. This heralded a transformation from personnel with the connotations of bureaucracy (CIPD, 2015c) and welfare (Evans, 1999) to a more strategic, business-aligned function which viewed the worker as a resource in itself. The view that human resource management offered something new and was expected to play an important role in implementing business strategies (Martell & Carroll, 2006) was criticised as being more like a "patchwork quilt" (Keenoy, 1990, p.7) in being a mix of many things which do not necessarily work in alignment or ethically (Winstanley & Woodall, 2000).

The move from a personnel to HRM provision has resulted in more and more responsibility for people management being devolved to line managers; Guest (1988) felt that line managers should be given the duty for HRM as personnel functions lacked both imagination and influence. There is concern though that line managers accept this responsibility with much reluctance (Brewster & Larsen, 2000; McGovern, Gratton, Hope-Hailey, Stiles & Truss, 1997). Ulrich (1997) proposed that to maximise the strategic advantage, HR managers could no longer afford to concentrate on being the "policy police and regulatory watchdogs" (Ulrich, 1997, p.viii), adding that the 'hand holding' of line managers must also cease. Ulrich (1997) considered the role of 'HR Champion' would give HR managers more power and influence, which he embedded in the 'three legged stool' model (Ulrich & Brockbank, 2005).



The introduction of the 'three legged stool' model (Ulrich & Brockbank, 2005) has been widely implemented in the UK. CIPD (2007b) report that, to a greater or lesser degree, over 80% of UK organisations have changed the organisational structure of their HR department to replicate the model. Thus, the routine of HR tasks and processes separated HR from its organisation (Caruth, Pane Haden & Caruth, 2012) and left the Human Resource Business Partner to work strategically with the senior business leaders, centres of expertise for HR specialisms such as recruitment and selection and service centres for processing, payroll and other people related administrative tasks. Ulrich and Beatty (2001) noted that this widened to HR having a more proactive and strategic role, but narrowed the brief in terms of solution focused procedural HR. The outsourcing of HR functions has resulted in reduced employee morale (Garaventa & Tellefsen, 2001) and the loss of 'local face of HR' is lamented (Caruth et al., 2012).

### **6.2.2 HR policy and procedure**

Bullying, anti-bullying, dignity at work and zero tolerance (Woodrow & Guest, 2012) policies should be distinctive, easily recognisable, give clear guidance and be cognisant of the policy design noted in Section 2.8.1. Bowen and Ostroff (2004) note that these factors, coupled with consistent and comprehensive communication to workers at all levels are essential in the pursuit of successful policy implementation. Skinner (1981) advocated that leaving all of this to HR was remiss and that organisational senior leaders had a part to play with active and authentic support (Becker, Huselid and Ulrich, 2001; Dex & Scheibl, 1999; Guest & Woodrow, 2012) and that they must take "fair and decisive" action (Thirlwall, 2015, p.156).

Woodrow and Guest (2012) reviewed data from the UK Department of Health NHS national survey which demonstrated significant levels of concern in workers' lack of faith in the HR function and process; the function would not be supportive should a complaint of workplace bullying be made to it. CIPD's (2015d) research concurred, noting that the majority of staff in much wider organisational settings agreed that their employers did not deal fairly or adequately with bullying. This confirms views from other parties' perspectives, that this is from both the target and the (alleged) bully's points of view and is an acknowledged issue by some concerned specialist investigators and those accused (CIPD Professional Communities 2007, 2008a, 2008b, 2011, 2012a, 2012b, 2013a, 2013b, 2013c, 2014).

Research provides advice and guidance on what an anti-bullying policy should contain (CIPD's HR-inform 2013; Crothers et al., 2009; Hoel & Cooper, 2000; Rayner, 1999, 2007). Despite

much guidance then, Khilji and Wang (2006) noted a widening chasm between espoused policy and policy in practice. Perhaps this demonstrates the UK nurses lack of faith in HR's bullying related policy and procedure which Woodrow and Guest's (2012) NHS research highlighted? Hoel and Cooper (2000, pp.27-28) offered guidance which came from their research in the UK on the prevalence of workplace bullying and noted that organisations should seek to:

- Establish a culture free of bullying
- Introduce effective, safe and fair policies on bullying
- Confront and challenge abrasive management styles
- Reduce bullying by reducing levels of stress
- Control the controllable

These recommendations (Hoel & Cooper, 2000) are broader than policy statements and consider a more holistic approach to the management of workplace bullying; what is less clear perhaps is how some of them might be achieved. Reductions in levels of work related stress may be achieved through cessation of organisational change and increased job security (CIPD, 2015b; Hoel & Salin, 2003; Matthiesen & Einarsen, 2007) but whether this is achievable or can be guaranteed is unlikely; gone is the notion of a 'job for life' (Hall & Moss, 1998; Heery & Noon, 2008). Organisations may consider their policy to be thoughtful, encompassing and supportive, but whether it is effective may only be questioned by those that come to use it or are subject of an allegation; with these two differing views and experiences it could be that consensus on the policy success is difficult to determine.

Hoel and Cooper's (2000, pp.27-28) recommendations are not clear on who should "confront and challenge abrasive management styles". Bullying policies can advocate a strategy which requires the target to 'confront and challenge' the bully (Adams, 1992; Killoren, 2014). MacIntosh, Wuest, Merritt Gray and Cronkhite (2010) caution though that when the bully holds a position of power, targets who have confronted the bully report an increase in the bullying.

Policies which are used infrequently may indicate success (Pate & Beaumont, 2010), however the danger then is that the skill and the adroitness of the HR or line manger charged with dealing with complaints may find a policy which has gathered dust and not be as trained, equipped or expert in the process and/or investigation that is needed. Managers may experience difficulty or be unwilling to enforce anti-bullying policies or measures as they perceive that they themselves are being bullied (Hoel & Beale, 2006). The dichotomy here is

that if HR is a partner to the business (Ulrich, 1997; Ulrich & Beatty, 2001) and not concerned with the implementation of policies and the responsibility for day-to-day people management is given to line managers, then are either parties appropriately equipped to deal the allegations?

Organisations tend to clearly state within their policies what constitutes gross misconduct and the suspension of a worker accused of workplace bullying should be considered (CIPD, 2015a; CIPD's HRinform, 2013). Suspension is not generally seen as a disciplinary act in itself, rather it removes the person from a situation allowing an investigation to progress; it may be for the safety of the organisation or the individual that this occurs, but either way, it is not an act which is taken lightly.

Although the participants in the study were accused of being a workplace bully, it was interesting to note that none had been suspended from their organisation and none mentioned this was a possibility or that they considered this may happen to them. Organisations may outwardly say that bullying is as serious as other acts of gross misconduct, but inwardly acknowledge the dichotomy that the allegation should be proven in some way before the suspension of a worker is undertaken. Perhaps there is an implied or subconscious understanding that the alleged bully is *innocent until proven guilty* or, at least that further evidence is required to support the claim.

In reality, it seemed more likely that an accused worker would be advised of the allegation and then expected to return to their work role and continue to manage their team as they had done before. Participants noted how they were expected to return to their work and continue to go about their role, which often involved the line management of the accuser, without any support from their own or other senior managers.

One participant noted that the investigation had gone beyond the confines of the organisation, with their clients and customers being interviewed. This was not revealed until they were advised there was no case to be answered, by which time Participant 1 felt no vestige of confidentiality had been afforded to them, despite warnings that they must not discuss the matter with anyone.

Investigations into claims of bullying can be undertaken internally by the organisation or through the engagement of an external consultant. Either way, the investigation should offer external verification which, if thorough, meaningful and robust will expose claims which are vexatious or nefarious or brought about by people with a grudge (Goldman, Gutek, Stein & Lewis, 2006). What may be harder to determine and investigate are cases where claimants have been over-sensitive or there is simply a lack of evidence. Cowan (2012, p.343) is critical of HR's attitude towards allegations, as they consider them to be the claimant's "misperceptions of another's behaviour". Hence the need for a clear policy and investigation strategy which is mindful of not only the negative behaviours but the perspective of the target (Cowan, 2012). In the adversarial arena there may also be potential for vexatious or over-sensitive claims to lead to counter-claim. In McGregor's (2015) review, it is noted that policies are written with the victim in mind and that they are perhaps viewed as the priority in terms of support, investigation and resolution.

Recommendations around good management and investigation of allegations of workplace bullying are common-place (ACAS, 2010; CIPD, 2005, 2007a, 2007b, 2015a; CIPD's HR-inform, 2013; Crothers et al, 2009; Syedain, 2006). CIPD's HR-inform (2013) suggests that complaints should be thoroughly and promptly investigated with due regard for confidentiality. Jenkins (2013, p.4-5) notes that "the investigation of bullying [and harassment] is often adversarial". Those who feel bullied are likely to review their experience against the criteria set out in the bullying behaviours noted in the organisational policy and seek the support of others who will generally agree with them (D'Cruz & Noronha, 2010; Jenkins et al., 2012).

Research participants raised the issue of their different treatment in relation to the confidentiality instructions they received; participants felt significantly more bound by the warnings of confidentiality than the accusers did. There is a similarity between the organisation's actions and perpetrators of domestic violence in the use of isolating techniques (Quigg, 2011), in effect before an investigation commences, the organisation uses "corporate coercive techniques" (McGregor, 2015) against the accused. D'Cruz and Noronha (2010) and Jenkins et al. (2012) established that a bullied target will speak to many colleagues and work-mates before making a claim. In the investigation process, witnesses, bystanders and others may be interviewed which although essential for a full and thorough investigation may further lessen the alleged bully's perception of their own privacy, anonymity, confidentiality and widen their view that the disparity of expectation on both parties is polarised.

The sense of being treated differently, in a way which was tantamount to bullying itself, was reported by the participants who felt they had been the subject of a series of negative acts, over time and with frequency before, during and for some after, the management intervention. Participant concerns that they had not been able to explain themselves in a way they felt heard could be the result of identifiable victim effect (Hamilton & Sherman, 1996) in that the 'victim' had made themselves known to HR and the rest that followed had a presumption that the accused was therefore the perpetrator. In considering the cautions raised by Jenkins et al. (2012) and Tehrani (2003) there seems sufficient participant concern to encourage HR to consider how it can address these issues and heighten line manager and/or investigator understanding. Jenkins et al. (2012) expressed concern that there can be an incorrect assumption that the first to report to HR is automatically a victim and Tehrani's (2003) warning that either or both parties may have engaged in negative acts towards each other and, as a result, identifying which party is which can be difficult.

### **6.2.3 Protected characteristics**

It is acknowledged that unique personal and/or group characteristics can be an antecedent for being a target of workplace bullying; ethnicity (Fox & Stallworth, 2005; Hogg et al., 2011), sexual orientation (Salin, 2003); poor health and disability (Kivimäki et al., 2003); mental ill-health and disability (Mikkelsen & Einarsen, 2002; Janoff-Bulman, 1992). Olender-Russo (2009) suggested that simply being different from the majority increased the likelihood of being bullied in the workplace.

A significant contribution to academic research and understanding of bullying within lesbian, gay men and bisexual groups by Hoel et al. (2014) has recently been published. Hoel et al.'s (2014) research established that someone in these protected groups was twice as likely to be a victim of workplace bullying than other workers. Although not the primary focus of Hoel et al.'s research, findings around dual discrimination were evident. Dual discrimination of the protected characteristics of sexual orientation and disability further increased the likelihood of being bullied, as did age and sexual orientation.

As the theory emerged from the data it became evident that the prevalence of protected characteristics of the participants in this research may be significant. It is important to note that 50% of the participants considered their protected characteristic a reason or influencing factor in the allegation being made and a further participant had not considered it. Table 7 overleaf presents details of the five participants who fit in protected groups.

Participant	Protected characteristic	Considered a reason or influence in the allegation
1	Disability	Yes
3	Age, race, sexual orientation	Yes
4	Perceived sexual orientation, race	Yes
7	Disability, sexual orientation	Not considered
8	Disability, sex	Yes

**Table 7 Participant protected characteristics**

The participants were concerned that they may have been the target of an allegation by virtue of their protected characteristic. Research by Hoel et al. (2014) raised similar concerns, although it focused on the targets of workplace bullying; seemingly both targets and alleged perpetrators share the same concern. Discrimination on the grounds of a protected characteristic is illegal throughout the European Union and in the UK specifically under the Equality Act 2010.

Salin (2003) and Branch, Ramsey & Barker (2007a) acknowledged that there are individuals who will make allegations of workplace bullying in order to achieve their own objectives; were that objective to be focused on the dislike of someone different in the workplace, then the researcher considers this would and should be of serious and significant concern. Does this research then alert us to a potential for protected characteristics to not only leave a worker vulnerable to being bullied, but also vulnerable to being accused of being a bully as a discriminatory measure in itself?

### **6.3 Emotional reactions – Section 2**

This section discusses the *emotional reactions* which emerged from the participants' data; there is little research which offers insight into the experience of those accused of workplace bullying (Einarsen, 2014). Participants were concerned with the social and psychological associations of being called and labelled a bully and likened this to what was to them the most serious of allegations that could be made in their professional capacity and role.

The interrelationship between the grounded theory categories is evident again here; the *desire to be believed* is key in both feelings of *being bullied back* and being treated differently. Participants discussed their personal emotional reactions and their more business focused

reactions, from which the dimensions of feeling disconnected from the organisation. In exploring these concepts in more detail, parallels are drawn between the emotional reactions of (alleged) bullies and that of targets.

### **6.3.1 Seeking validation**

For several participants, the need to justify the actions they had taken with the accuser prior to the allegation being made was paramount, as was their almost internal monologue which reviewed their career path and work activities. The emerging split of these two sub categories, allowed the researcher to explore further how the participants reassured themselves that they had not intentionally acted to cause harm and their reaction to the allegations. Participants explained they had done what their HR function or line manager had advised which was to commence or continue with the relevant formal process of performance and absence related policies but felt unsupported when the complaint came as a result of their management action. Whilst trying to understand the participant's experience it was not sufficient to simply accept that a manager's behaviour and decisions were right or appropriate; negative acts and bullying could still occur. The study participants were factual and considerate in their discussions with the researcher and the all showed concern and empathy for their accuser. Townend (2008) highlighted how workplace bullying could strike at the very foundations of confidence and esteem of targets, that the recollections are vivid, clear and comprehensive, despite the passing of time. This same destabilising impact seemed to also apply to the (alleged) bullies; the degree of detail in their recollection of events was clear and their reflection seemed meaningful. Presenteeism, the attendance at work whilst ill (Johns, 2010) featured in the participants' experiences; the want or need to remain at work, in post, performing in their role was also important to them and perhaps suggestive of further research.

The consequences and costs discussed in the literature review relate predominantly to research undertaken with targets and organisations (Giga et al., 2008) whilst the ramifications for the perpetrator are under explored (Einarsen, 2014; Jenkins 2011; Lewis, 2014; Salin, 2014). Giorgi (2010) and Hoel et al., (2001) established that targets have higher levels of both physical and mental ill-health; Mikkelsen and Einarsen (2002) reported targets have higher levels of depression. Participants discussed how they had to manage the impact on themselves, particularly in terms of their feelings of isolation and separation which were juxtaposed with their perception of needing to be present at work and to ensure they achieved targets set for them. Extreme or continuing emotional reactions can lead to or result in

mental ill-health (Matthiesen & Einarsen, 2004; Quine, 2001; Rospenda et al., 2009). Perhaps similarly the impact of the allegation and ensuing workplace procedure may do the same, particularly if this is (perceived to be) predicated on an assumption by others of the accused's guilt. Participants discussed how they struggled to remain present at work, but felt it vitally important to do so; if not saying good morning could be viewed as a negative act (Tehrani, 2003) then the potential of being the subject of an allegation could increase.

There are perhaps avenues for research to explore a possible link between levels of workplace bullying and mental ill-health. Recent reports (NHS, 2015) have added to Woodrow and Guest's (2012) research concerning the UK's National Health Service (NHS), detailing the service has the highest levels of mental health concerns and higher than ever reports of workplace bullying. The particularly high levels perhaps tie in with the earlier research which suggests that almost 90% of bullies have also been victims (Linton & Power, 2012) and a culture of workplace bullying has developed as a result. McAvoy and Murtagh (2003) supported a link between depression and the interpretation of negative acts and De Lange et al. (2005) noted a gloomier perception mechanism in anxious or depressed workers which could manifest itself in being less than positive about what was happening around them. Could it also be the case that the more depressed a worker is, the more negative acts they are likely to perpetrate and more likely to view the act of someone else as negative, whether it had been intentional and a one off or not? Kivimaki et al. (2003) and Nielsen et al. (2012) discussed a cyclical pattern of vulnerability and/or poor health as a result of being bullied is liable to increase the person's vulnerability to further bullying. The researcher posits whether this is more the development of a spiral which decreases the more exposure to anxiety, depression, other mental ill-health and workplace bullying. Einarsen (1999) was concerned with seeking to understand more of the notion of what comes first; the characteristics associated with being bullied and whether these the usual traits of the person (e.g. naturally quiet, shy, low social skills, pre-existing anxiety and depression) or whether they came about as a result of being bullied?

Participants in this research described a range of emotions which could, if not resolved, lead to them experience ill-health and disconnection within their organisation; as a result of this it is possible they may face further allegations or criticism. All participants explained they felt their own mental health and well-being deteriorated. D'Cruz and Noronha (2010) reported that there was a marked increase in the ill-health of witnesses of workplace bullying, including guilt, fear, insomnia, headaches and fatigue. It seems logical to extend this consideration to the (alleged) bully, especially if the allegation is not proven, unfounded or even vexatious.



The participants also explained how they were shocked when they were told of the allegation but also afterwards, when some had been exonerated by their organisation. Participants who were 'cleared of all charges' when the issue of the claimant's intention was connected with an organisational rather than personal matter were shocked again. Duffy and Sperry (2007) explained how targets felt shocked when their organisation did not follow its anti-bullying policy. It seems reasonable to accept that a falsely accused bully may well experience the same shock and disappointment with their organisation, particularly if they have experienced *disconnected loyalty* during the investigation and procedure.

Participants noted that social and psychological associations with being called a bully which stemmed from the school playground had developed into something that was an easy allegation to make; there was agreement that the allegation had been used as a means to an end (Branch et al., 2007a; Salin, 2003). Bullies have been caricatured by both the popular and professional press and whilst this has been helpful in raising issues and encouraging discussion, the participants concerns returned to the definition of workplace bullying. As the accused, the (alleged) bullies were more likely to associate with the academic definition (Einarsen et al., 2011) whilst a target may associate more with a sensationalised definition (Unite, 2012) which exemplifies bullying behaviours. Perhaps telling was the participants' concern that an accusation of racism or rape (as they had compared bullying to) would not be made lightly or without due cause, but labelling and submitting an accusation of bullying is easier to make. If (alleged) bullies perceive they are treated as guilty from the outset and feel treated as such throughout they feel they have been labelled. Participants who were later exonerated struggled to come to terms with the treatment that had been meted out to them when their actions had not been intended or deemed to have been negative ones.

### **6.3.2 Isolated and separation**

D'Cruz et al. (2014) noted that targets of workplace bullying experienced a sense of alienation from their organisation as they become aware the environment had unexpectedly become an unfamiliar one and what they knew and understood as their usual environment and situation disappeared. This develops into feeling overpowered as targets experience "compound bullying" (D'Cruz et al., 2014, p.1445). The emerging theory and findings in this study with (alleged) bullies mirrored these experiences, which the participants expressed as shock, isolation and separation. Feelings of emotions which seem to replicate those a target feels could equally apply to the (alleged) bully but also to witnesses and bystanders who may see events unfold and feel unsupported by organisational action or reaction. The isolation and

perception of being treated as guilty from the outset by their organisation which stemmed from feeling bullied and not believed led the participants to develop self-coping mechanisms.

## **6.4 Self-coping mechanisms – Section 3**

This section progresses the discussion around mediation as a means of offering a *right of reply* to all parties which the participants felt had been denied them. This was highlighted as being something that would have been useful in helping to cope with what was happening to them. The participants also highlighted how their reflection had led to an improved self-awareness and it may be that organisations can make proactive moves to assist with this, rather than the (alleged) bully needing to locate this for themselves.

### **6.4.1 Mediation**

Participants had considered a possible route for them having a *right to reply* could be through mediation. Mediation offers benefits in that it not only has the potential to significantly reduce costs, provide a speedier resolution and conclusion but importantly offers 'empowerment' to both parties involved (Irvine, 2014). These personal benefits and wider efficiencies for the organisation come from a swifter resolution, especially when mediation is offered at the start of a process or workplace bullying allegation, rather than at the end (Roche & Teague, 2012). This earlier resolution may also lessen the need to involve a wider group of workers, such as investigators, HR staff, hearing and discipline managers, as well as those outside the workplace context, such as friends or family of both the target and the perpetrator. In the way costs and consequences of workplace bullying were considered in Section 2.6 in terms of impact and effect on the organisations bottom line, reputation and success, mediation has the potential to reduce this damage (CIPD, 2011).

Despite the support to workers and the potential savings mediation offers, CIPD (2011) and Latreille, Buscha and Conte (2012) argue that the cost is a significant hurdle which is seen as prohibitive particularly by smaller organisations and that larger, often public sector organisations are more likely to have introduced and embraced mediation as a resolution vehicle. The 2011 Workplace Employment Relations Study (WERS, 2013) noted 7% of employers engaged in mediation and noted that it is not an alternate dispute resolution vehicle that is widely used/offered. The reported benefits for the parties involved in mediation have included an early and/or speedy response which prevents the entrenchment of either or both parties; a confidential environment; the opportunity for parties to discuss their personal

experience and the impact of it, whilst also being able to understand the same of the other party; the avoidance of a formal resolution which has potential to delay, limit or damage an individual's career or promotion prospects (ACAS, 2013).

In the UK Government's Comprehensive Spending Review (HM Treasury, 2013), objectives for the reduction of employment tribunal claims and the introduction of fees to take cases to tribunal were announced and came into practice in June 2013 (BIS, 2011; Sanders, 2009). Whilst these costs are explored in the literature review at Section 2.7, it is pertinent to note here that the tribunal fees have affected both claimants and defendants. The expense of external mediation (not that which an organisation may run on an in-house basis) are in the region of £1,200 – £2,000 (BIS, 2010) whilst employment tribunal hearing legal costs are estimated at £6,200 (BIS, 2010), the legal advice fees at £4,137 (Xpert HR, 2013a) plus a total cost (excluding legal fees) of £15,746 (Xpert HR, 2013b). The cost to the UK exchequer prior to the introduction of tribunal fees was estimated at £3,200 per tribunal case (BIS, 2013). If an organisation is able to reduce the fees, legal, tribunal and other costs by using mediation, there are considerable savings to be had.

Two of the research participants were offered mediation at the end of the investigation process but considered it would have been more appropriate much earlier, before their working relationship with the accuser had broken down to the point where differences seemed irreconcilable to them.

ACAS (2009) argues that when offered early in the initial signs of breakdown in working relationships mediation is most effective and a valuable tool in dispute resolution. Training for supervisory, first line managers and secondary, senior managers in identifying and promoting mediation as an early intervention in dispute resolution (in a similar way issues of workplace bullying, through policy, process and staff training/awareness raising) would be a valuable way to promote mediation services. In doing so, organisations do not shift responsibility for bullying onto individuals (Deakin, 2014) but do place them in control of the resolution through an empowering process (Irvine, 2014). Moreover, should an organisation delay dealing with workplace conflict until it has deteriorated to the point of bullying it will potentially leave itself vulnerable to a range of costs and consequences, including retaliatory actions by the claimant and legal claims (Jenkins, 2011). Most bullying comes about through a process of conflict escalation (Einarsen & Stogstad, 1996; Zapf et al., 2003) which Zapf and

Gross (2001) suggest make mediation at an early stage optimal in resolving the conflict reasonably whilst parties are more interested in resolution.

Mediation is usually a confidential process with only the mediator and the involved parties aware of the content and conclusion (CIPD, 2013); this may be useful in considering remedies for the participants' concerns that the whole process and procedure was anything but. Whilst this 'privatising' may allow organisations to mask any workplace or organisational bullying/bad practice (Mahoney & Klass, 2008; Ridley-Duff & Bennett, 2011) measures can be taken to avoid this. Through careful organisational information management, perhaps maintained in the confines of the HR function, statistics regarding repeated attendance by either party can be monitored and necessary intervention taken to manage repeat users of the mediation service.

#### **6.4.2 Other coping mechanisms**

Participants felt it important that they should be able to access organisational provision for support which was made available to the accuser, despite not being confident they themselves would have taken advantage of it. There was a dissonance between what they said they wanted and whether they would actually use it if it were available. McGregor (2015) notes that those accused of bullying are likely to be concerned that accessing occupational health, counselling or welfare provision will be noted (formally or informally) on their personnel records and damage their reputation or career at some future point. Perhaps as research with perpetrators of workplace bullying increases, whether allegations are proven or not, it will shed light onto how those accused feel they could be supported and what support they might access.

Participants were concerned that support from their work-friendship groups had been closed off to them as a result of their being bound by the confidentiality parameters placed upon them. As a result, they felt unable to talk to colleagues, felt isolated and almost became the subject of gossip because they wouldn't say what was going on to people they would ordinarily have spoken with. The need for confidentiality is important, as discussed earlier, but it is interesting to note that there may be a need to understand how this removes the support structures for the accused.

There is a need to balance the level of support offered to both claimants and (alleged) bullies. Alleged or proven bullies may also benefit from similar levels of support given to targets, rather than being reliant on self-coping mechanisms. Parzefall and Salin (2010) demonstrated that support for targets of workplace bullying is essential to tackle and resolve incidents; targets who receive organisational support were noted as having lower levels of stress and heightened well-being than unsupported targets. However, overwhelming organisational support given to the target may perpetuate a victim mentality which may not give claimants the impetus to develop their own support or coping mechanisms. In doing so the claimant may develop skills which could help them address negative acts perpetrated on them in the future in such a way the issues do not develop into bullying.

Participants explained that they had sought personal development and reflected on the allegation and ensuing procedures, acknowledging that this felt beneficial for them. Recent research with (alleged) bullies notes that the majority of participants had undertaken either self-development programmes, up-skilled themselves and had engaged in coaching (DeSanti, 2014). The participants in this research reported similar experiences and had undertaken similar activities. It seems that the need for support in some way extends beyond the organisational procedural time frame and that there is opportunity to explore how mentoring and/or coaching could be of support to both parties.

### **6.5 Managerial responsibility and action – Section 4**

This section relates to the professional working relationship the (alleged) bully had with their accuser and how this emerged as the category *managerial responsibility and action*. Participants discussed how involvement with other managerial policies or processes which had potential for negative outcomes on the accusers (formal warnings, dismissal) may have left the participants vulnerable to an allegation.

The interrelationship between the grounded theory categories is again evident again here; the *disconnected loyalty* is evident when a managerial task has to be undertaken and the (alleged) bully becomes the embodiment or personification of the organisational policy.

### **6.5.1 Defensive reactions of claimants**

Liefooghe and Mackenzie-Davey (2001) noted that a target would often blame bullying on the organisation or work environment; this could be a concern about job insecurity (Hobfoll, 1989), organisational changes (Salin, 2003) or attempts to frustrate another process which had negative connotations for the claimant (Branch et al, 2007a; D'Cruz et al, 2014; Salin, 2003) are potential triggers for workplace bullying. Participants in this research explained how they were engaged in organisational practices or were managing individuals who were subject of change within their organisation which they felt was at the heart of the allegation made against them. Participants were concerned that the accusation made against them had arisen more from the claimant being involved in another formal management procedure or changing work environment. There were instances where a reluctance to adapt to changing organisational policy or restructuring and the ensuing change which accompanied it resulted in the allegation. In declining requests for early retirement, awarding smaller bonus payments and staff being in a selection pool in business reorganisation participants believed that their organisational decisions became personal ones in the eye of their accuser.

Stucke and Sporer (2002, p.511) noted that the notion of "defensive... emotional reactions"; a response to being threatened which had generated anger and that this anger was then redirected back onto the perceived source of the threat. Whilst Stucke and Sporer's (2002) study linked narcissism to anger, the essence was that if what you seek to achieve or attain is not given or awarded to you then you retaliate and hit back at whomever you perceive denied you. In understanding the participants' experiences their not agreeing to the request put to them resulted in them becoming the subject of the allegation, rather than the organisation who had in fact made the decisions. Birks, Budden, Stewart and Chapman (2014) concur, acknowledging that workers may find an easier way to vent at someone they see as the one as the organisation's representative, than manage their anxiety and frustration in another way.

D'Cruz et al. (2014, p.1435) termed this as "depersonalised bullying", whereby the bullying stems from change within or action taken by an organisation. D'Cruz et al. (2014) established that workers view line managers as being complicit in the organisation's actions as they are the ones declining the employee's request or managing the formal process. This same study noted that workers see absence management as "oppressive and abusive" (D'Cruz et al., 2014 p. 1435) and organisational change which led to redundancy was bullying.

This research from the (alleged) bully's perspective has effectively triangulated what earlier research has established from a target perspective (Branch et al., 2007a, 2007b; D'Cruz et al., 2014; Salin, 2003) in that organisational change and management under a formal policy are antecedents for allegations of workplace bullying being raised during formal procedures. As such managers, peers or workers can become the personification of organisational policy and therefore there is potential for them to be accused and become a vicarious bully by virtue of their actions for and on behalf of the organisation.

Definitions of workplace bullying ignore the possible intentions of a claimant who attempts to divert attention from their behaviour, perhaps using a grievance to delay or frustrate a disciplinary hearing, despite the recognition that this does occur. Recommendations and comprehensive advice from professional bodies such as ACAS (2010) and the CIPD (2007b) recognises that policies and procedures should make provision for nefarious or vexatious claims and that the same must be adhered to throughout, else confidence in them and in the organisation will be damaged (McGregor, 2015). Headline definitions (CIPD, 2005; Einarsen et al., 2011; Unite, 2012) do not allude to a potential that such allegations can be made, but it may be that organisational awareness of this happening should be heightened. One participant expressed deep regret that there seemed a routine-ness about the allegation; that the claim against them was almost expected and routine, perhaps encouraged by the worker's representative as a means to delay probation review so that termination of contract could not be effected within the policy-bound time period. Other participants echoed these thoughts and were concerned that whilst the policy needs to be effective to support 'when someone really is being bullied' because the risk is that if making allegations becomes routine then the genuine cases won't receive the due care and attention they merit.

These concerns tie in with Liefhoghe and Mackenzie-Davey's (2001) work which explained the target will apportion blame to the line manager or supervisor for what the organisation practices. Samnami (2013, p.295) proposed that in a more "collectivist culture", where trade union or workplace representatives are embedded in the organisation, targets may be less likely to view organisational negative behaviours or acts as bullying. This has implications for the serious stress and ill-health related consequences of workplace bullying as these are likely to be lessened by the mediation of the collective bargaining interface (Samnami, 2013, p.295).

Issues for consideration in instances of upwards bullying, noting specifically that the first to HR should not automatically be considered the target (Jenkins et al., 2012), include the

impact on the manager who may be more reluctant to seek advice or resolution through the organisational hierarchical or procedural channels. In a study in the US Army, Miller (1997) noted that senior female officers were loath to request assistance when they were being upwards bullied for fear that this would be interpreted as their inability to get along with others or failure in their leadership role.

The person with the power (Hoel et al., 2001; Salin, 2003), is considered likely to be the one perceived to be doing the negative act, such as declining requests or awarding smaller bonus payments, as these are functions of their supervisory or managerial role. Bullying is viewed from a power perspective (Jenkins et al., 2011; Keashly & Jagatic, 2003) but it is feasible that these perceived negative acts may be rooted in an almost power-less position which is given to a manager by the organisation. It is not necessarily that the manager 'chooses' to do the act, but that they are 'required' to do it; it is the policy guidelines which will or may require them to do so. Hoel and Beale (2006) considers managers in these circumstances may themselves be bullied by the organisation in terms of being required to do the company's bidding; a situation which could result in the person with power (whether managerial power or other) finding themselves in an intolerable situation; between a 'rock and a hard place' (Guest & Woodrow, 2012). Birks et al. (2014, p.1686) suggest this is "simply that individuals who respond negatively to reasonable expectations of an effective manager exploit the intolerance that organizations have for bullying in general". The participants' views supported and agreed with this sentiment as they discussed their concerns around their attempts at managing workers who would engage in the "misuse of organizational policy" (Birks et al., 2014, p.1685) in order to frustrate the legitimate management action and responsibility of their role.

These are key considerations for HR functions and investigators as it is likely to be unusual for organisations to receive reports of upwards bullying. Managers fear doing so would undermine their current position and career prospects (Miller, 1997) and the ensuing reduction in self-confidence, from their own personal perspective or their perceptions of the organisation's view will not only decrease resilience, but also restrict their ability to manage. Managers need to be empowered to raise their insecurities about management practice through training and support.



## **6.6 Grounded theory credibility – Section 5**

Glaser and Strauss (1967) used the central criteria of fit, work and relevance with “modifiability” becoming an important criterion (Glaser, 1978, p.5) in evaluating whether the grounded theory was well constructed. Glaser (1992) later noted the need for parsimony and scope to be considered in the generation of the grounded theory and in demonstrating rigour. It is appropriate to evaluate the grounded theory of *guilty until proven innocent* against the questions ‘What is the main concern of participants?’ and ‘How do they resolve their main concern or understand what is happening?’ (Glaser, 1978). This is done with a brief review of the emergent theoretical model against the central criteria.

### **6.6.1 Fit**

Fit is concerned that the emerged data explains the responses to the problem (Glaser, 1978; Hunter et al., 2011). Participants discussed their experiences of being accused of being a workplace bully and although situations, roles, instances and circumstances were different, each experience fits with the sub categories which feed into the core category and explains their primary concerns. This was achieved through the revisiting of emerging concepts and categories by the processes of memoing, reflection and constantly comparing how later data fit with previous instances. Each of the participant’s experiences fit and relate to the grounded theory of *guilty until proven innocent*.

### **6.6.2 Work**

Work is the capacity for the theory to describe the variations in participant’s behaviour and how the theory supports their experience of what has happened; for some this may be to the point where they resolve their concerns (Glaser, 1998). In theoretical coding, sampling and constant comparison the theory *guilty until proven innocent* explains through the sub categories and the dimensions of these, that there is a pattern sufficient to demonstrate what the experience of being accused of workplace bullying is like.

### **6.6.3 Relevance**

The fit and work of the grounded theory demonstrate its relevance (Glaser, 1992). The explanations of participants’ experiences through the theory of *guilty until proven innocent* are sufficient to demonstrate relevance to other workplace bullying research, despite the focus

of this having been predominantly from the target's perspective. Issues surrounding the value of support, the costs and consequences, the influence of policy and HR functions as well as the experiences of isolation, separation and shock seem as relevant for the (alleged) bully as they do the target and other parties.

#### **6.6.4 Modifiability**

As more research is undertaken with (alleged) bullies in the area of workplace bullying, the grounded theory should be able to flex, reshape and accommodate newly emerging theory (Glaser, 1978). It is through this development in the field that more will become known of the experiences, the mediating and moderating factors and the recommendations around the management of the issues; the grounded theory of *guilty until proven innocent* is sufficiently wide and multi-dimensional to offer a supportive framework against which further research to be considered.

#### **6.6.5 Parsimony and scope**

Parsimony is concerned with the economic use of hypothesis and in offering a grounded theory, this is done with the least complicated conjecture. As data emerged from the participants in this classical grounded theory research, the model has been carefully constructed using the coding to develop the categories. The result is a framework which discusses what is of concern to the participants. Comprehensive and evolving analysis during the study, whilst developing the model and in the writing up of the research has generated a model which is streamlined and has been thoroughly explained. The model discusses how the sub categories support the categories and how they in turn support the core category. This demonstration of the relatedness and interrelatedness of the dimensions and comparison with extant literature produces a model which is relevant to the academic literature and operational management, thereby contributing to knowledge and practice.

### **6.6 Chapter synopsis**

This chapter expanded the findings from this research through the emerged theoretical grounded theory model *guilty until proven innocent*, discussing and critiquing them in the context of extant literature. Whilst much academic and practitioner work is focused on other parties involved in the research or management of the phenomenon of workplace bullying, there are links to the experiences of the (alleged) bully. Concerns for targets, bystanders

and witnesses have accord with the participants' experiences; the potential for a review of HR structures, policies, procedures, support and interventions were explored in detail.

The isolation, separation and general lack of support was resonant for the (alleged) bully and discussion was offered as to how organisational policy and research could be expanded further to provide a more holistic and supportive approach for all involved. The need for an organisation and a manager to be able to manage is of concern to participants and seemingly, there is a growing body of research (Birks et al., 2014; Branch et al., 2007a, 2007b, D'Cruz et al., 2014; Jenkins, 2011; Liefoghe & Mackenzie-Davey, 2001; Salin, 2003) which concurs, noting that an allegation of bullying can be as a means to an end (Branch et al., 2007) or lodged in response to an organisational issue (Liefoghe and Mackenzie-Davey, 2001; Hobfoll, 1989).

Grounded theory as a research method has advantages in that it is a "very detailed and meticulous process" (Matthews & Ross, 2010, p.137). In reviewing the grounded theory *guilty until proven innocent* against Glaser and Strauss' (1967) and Glaser's (1992) evaluation criteria the contribution and relevance to both academic research and practitioner management is demonstrated.

The following chapter offers conclusions of the study, considers limitations to the research and offers suggestions for further research into both experiences and management of (alleged) bullies and other parties which have stemmed from this research.

## **Chapter 7: Conclusions**

The seventh chapter summarises the discussions, emphasising key points which link to the recommendations in the following chapter and also reviews the aims and objectives of the study. This chapter is presented in three sections, the first considers the conclusions and then Section 2 critiques the limitations of this research. This is followed by Section 3 which offers suggestions for further research. A brief synopsis finishes this chapter, noting that further confirmatory research in this newly researched area of the phenomenon of workplace bullying will be valuable to all affected.

### ***7.1 Conclusions – Section 1***

In discussing the conclusions of this research, this section is further divided in order to highlight the significant points that lie at the heart of the investigation. It is also appropriate at this point to review the research questions in order to validate the purpose of the research in addressing the study aims and objectives and demonstrating its contribution to knowledge and practice.

#### **7.1.1 Views from (alleged) bullies**

There is a general enough understanding of workplace bullying and the term 'bully'; so much so that it is widely accepted that it has negative connotations automatically ascribed to it. The general lived experience of being accused of being a workplace bully is not sufficiently known or well understood (Hauge et al., 2009). The typical perception of a workplace bully is not a line manager who is trying to performance manage an under achieving member of staff or a supervisor who wants to do a good job. Targets are not always the sensitive souls (Hauge et al., 2009) they purport to be. When a lay-person talks about a bully it is about deliberate intent, as an aggressor, causing psychological damage to the identified and hunted victim. The lived experience of participants in this research is widely different; the (alleged) bullies did not see themselves, their behaviour or their intention as bullying. The participants did not say this flippantly, rather there had been deep, meaningful and constructive reflection on their part. This acknowledgement of the understanding their accusers' perception as well as their accuser's wider intent and ambition has had a profound effect upon them. This wider ambition on the accuser's part was frequently the need to stop, frustrate or delay a formal management process and/or achieve financial recompense. Organisations and HR should be aware of the impact organisational changes may have on members of staff and as such

consider the whole picture surrounding an allegation of workplace bullying in a holistic fashion. Developing an awareness and being mindful of identifiable victim effect (Hamilton & Sherman, 1996) will also lead to support being available for both accuser and accused. Earlier resolution options, awareness of other influencing factors (other formal policies) and accessible support should result in both parties feeling believed, being supported, treated fairly and issues resolved in such a way that organisations can appropriately manage claims of workplace bullying.

### **7.1.2 HR structure and policy**

Woodrow and Guest (2014) established that it is the implementation of policies where the HR function's interests and involvement can be lacking, despite the policy itself being created in line with good practice and careful consideration. Fox and Cowan (2015) note that the creation and maintenance of a corporate culture which is one of dignity and respect will challenge the emphasis placed on the Ulrich (1997) model and strategic human resource business partner (HRBP) role. In doing so, however the key HR skills of liaising between the worker and the organisation, of enforcing policy and crucially of being able to moderate disputes (Snell, Morris & Bohlander, 2014) will assist HR managers to remain connected to the workforce develop a culturally responsive dignity in the workplace and address workplace bullying.

Partnering the business and supporting the achievements of strategic goals can develop a perception that the HRBP has no interest in the actual workers who constitute the human resource itself. The original interest in worker welfare as a means to affecting better business outputs through the care for the workforce is lost as their distinctive worker representation is lamented (Caruth et al., 2012). Ethically sensitive (Woodrow & Guest, 2012) HR practitioners will rise to the challenge of managing the phenomenon of workplace bullying and the widening of academic and practitioner awareness of research with bullies will support this. It is the structural fabric of a HR function which must consider if it is truly fit for purpose and whether it being a champion of employee voice and engagement with the workforce is something that can be done remotely from a service centre. This research suggests that having an accessible, available and involved HR function may better manage workplace bullying complaint handling and offer a better support mechanism to all parties. With the Ulrich (1997) HR model embedded in many organisations (CIPD, 2007a), Salin's (2008) observation that the HR department lacks welfare functionality and is no longer the provider of traditional welfare management rings true. Salin (2008) notes that it is characteristic of HR functions to divest itself of responsibility and is therefore no longer a place where a target or a line manager can

seek support or advice; this could similarly be extended to consider the support which an accused bully may seek. However, what is key is that the passing of responsibility and the structure of HR departments may have removed a supportive resource for all involved in the allegation, investigation and management of workplace bullying. Line managers who are rushed, hurried, untrained, not aware of HR policies, not good at managing, not HR specialists and who have other output demands placed upon them may not be the best people to place at the heart of people management. HR functions can remedy much of this with supportive workplace training and raising awareness amongst all staff. Moreover, the involvement of the HR function is essential if allegations concern an individual's line manager or are vexatious and the matter needs to progress to a disciplinary process for either party.

### **7.1.3 A sense of fairness in treatment and support**

Salin (2008) posited that passing HR responsibility in its entirety to line managers would not offer a supportive structure to workers, although HR policy can be used to signpost any involved party to advice and guidance. Support mechanisms available to those accused were identified as being limited with an added complexity that as managers, the participants' queried whether they would have actually accessed support had it been available. When two workers in the same organisation are in the throes of a formal process due to an allegation of workplace bullying both should be offered the same support and protection. An investigation may lead to disciplinary action which may in turn lead to an individual being exited from the organisation. There is however a need for UK organisations to be cognisant of their duty of care under health and safety legislation and of the legal remedy available to individuals through the Employment Tribunal should a dismissal be considered unfair and/or discrimination has occurred (amongst other measures).

It was crucial to participants in this research that there should be an acknowledgement from HR functions in particular that there are two sides to a story and that the second of these should be as valid as the first. Concerns noted by Jenkins et al., (2012) were echoed by the participants in that the first to present themselves to HR or a senior line manager are deemed the victim. This then presents an assumption of guilt or at least a lack of innocence when the bully is still only an alleged one; the identifiable victim effect (Hamilton & Sherman, 1996) is one which HR practitioners can themselves be alert to and raise awareness in manager/investigator training. In managing this in a more constructive and supportive way, the overwhelming sense of isolation and separation the participants discussed could be reduced with appropriate measures to keep them updated, informed and connected in a similar way to that offered to the claimant.

Mediation has been shown to be an alternate dispute resolution option which would afford a right of reply to the accused and the accuser (Irvine, 2014). Through this provision it is possible for both parties to be supported by an independent mediator and for the organisation to significantly reduce costs and negative consequences (CIPD, 2011). Very recent research from CIPD (2015d) noted that 46% of survey respondents questioned about interpersonal conflict at work believed mediation would have been an effective approach.

### **7.1.5 Addressing the research questions**

The purpose of this research was to critically evaluate the lived experience and organisational implications of being accused of being a workplace bully, from the perspective of the (alleged) perpetrator. From eight in-depth, unstructured interviews with (alleged) bullies, their experiences have been used to analyse the themes, patterns and dimensions they described which is explained in the theoretical model *guilty until proven innocent*.

The research objectives were:

- Objective 1: To critically evaluate previous studies of adult workplace bullying with a focus on the (alleged) bully's perspective;
- Objective 2: To analyse the experience and/or impact of being accused of being a workplace bully; to listen to the accused's own story;
- Objective 3: To critically evaluate the accused's perception of their organisation's support mechanisms offered to them during the whole course of the procedure and beyond;
- Objective 4: To develop a grounded theory which explains these perceptions and the concerns of being accused of being a workplace bully;
- Objective 5: To contribute to the body of academic and operational practice when dealing with issues of workplace bullying.

The research has demonstrated the achievement of these objectives and in that process a wide range of participants' concerns and influencing factors have been identified. The evaluation of previous studies of adult workplace bullying have been reviewed in the literature review and expanded on to review the experiences of the participants in the discussions chapter of this thesis. Taking a critical perspective has illustrated that many of the costs, consequences, health and well-being concerns that exist from the perspectives of others affected by workplace bullying, including the organisation, may equally apply to the (alleged) bully. In analysing the participant's experiences, this thesis has given a unique insight into

an as yet under researched dimension of workplace bullying. The research participants found this a cathartic experience, feeling that they had not previously had an opportunity to explain themselves in an interview which had not been pre-judged. This had been a critically important aspect of the study methodology planning and perhaps useful for further research; the creation of a psychologically safe environment (Dindia, 2002) and early rapport building (Oppenheim, 1992) were both deemed essential in order to achieve the depth of discussion during the interview. Participants explained the support that had been offered to them; in essence this was not a significant amount, but interestingly when support was available there were concerns about how it would be viewed if an (alleged) bully who was a line manager accessed it. Having considered the concerns and experiences of the research participants through the structured analytical processes of classical grounded theory (Glaser, 1978, 1992; Glaser & Strauss, 1967) the grounded theory *guilty until proven innocent* is structured in a way it satisfies the evaluation criteria (Glaser, 1998) and illustrates the participants' primary concerns. The resulting thesis, along with the other requirements of the professional doctorate, Doctor of Business Administration complement one another and make a contribution both to professional practice and academic knowledge. In widening understanding of the (alleged) bully's perspective the gap in knowledge reduces. This thesis has made suggestions for further research, in terms of confirmatory analyses and strategies which will continue to develop awareness and knowledge. In turn, this contribution offers advice and guidance to organisations which are useful in the pursuit of the reduction and effective management of workplace bullying.

## **7.2 Limitations of this research – Section 2**

Grounded theory as a research method has advantages in that it is a "very detailed and meticulous process" (Matthews & Ross, 2010, p.137). As such, grounded theory intends to allow the emergence of theory, grounded in the data of the research so it explains the participants' central concerns. Grounded theory is not designed to test the theory, although it does seek to qualify and categorise it through the analytical process and in theoretical saturation. The testing of the grounded theory *guilty until proven innocent* could come from further work with larger sample sizes. The use of different methodology and analytical processes could compliment, compare or contrast with the findings from this research, adding more to what is known about the phenomena and the perspective of the accused. This said, there is benefit in the unbiased perspective grounded theory offers the research participants' experiences and the complete analysis through all of the analytical tenets ensure the core concerns reflect the participants and not the researcher's views.



A consequence of the grounded theory approach is that the researcher purposefully avoided developing pre-conceptions and as a result the extant literature was not reviewed before engaging in data collection. Indeed, had the researcher reviewed this literature beforehand, it would not have been a grounded theory study. As such, the researcher did not explore with participants whether they had themselves ever been a target or victim of workplace bullying; this could have proved useful in comparing Lee & Brotheridge's (2006) and Linton and Power's (2012) work which noted bullies were also victims and victims were also bullies. As participants noted they had felt bullied by the allegation itself and by their perception they were pre-judged as not innocent from the outset, this could have added to extant literature. Notwithstanding this, further research to consider strategies from a positive/negative support provision may prove valuable for all parties affected by bullying. In developing themes of research which offer insight and qualitative rich data with (alleged) bullies the researcher recommends that a psychologically safe environment (Dindia, 2002) is created and that the discussion is not accusatory in nature.

The study recruited a small number of participants who had been accused of workplace bullying. Coyne et al. (2003) and Einarsen et al. (2003) note bullies are likely to be a marginalised group; no one wants to be accused of being a bully and as such, research directly with bullies may be difficult to undertake, however further confirmatory research can remedy this. The consequences of a small sample may limit generalisation of the theory, however this research provides an initial theoretical framework for consideration. A larger sample would not necessarily have added to the depth of discussion and may have rendered meaningful analysis impossible. What has become evident from this study is that the views and experiences of the (alleged) bully contribute to the body of academic knowledge and to developments in the furtherance of good operational HR practice.

The researcher acknowledges that there are other support mechanisms that are not organisational, but can be found in the social and personal environment of the individuals.

### ***7.3 Further research – Section 3***

Further research which reviews the support mechanisms available to those accused of workplace bullying and whether the (alleged) bully finds these accessible, relevant and supportive would be valuable. The isolation, separation and lack of support participants experienced was of significant concern and all deemed it detrimental to their health and well-being. Understanding more about the support (alleged) bullies would appreciate could allow

a focused offering within the HR policy which provides support and is cognisant of the laws of natural justice and this grounded theory whereby those accused feel they are not judged guilty at the outset. Moreover, all research which is undertaken directly with those accused of workplace bullying will broaden academic and practitioner knowledge and understanding of the perception thus far under explored.

The researcher has developed an awareness through this research of how other work may support both the organisation and the individuals affected by workplace bullying. As such, research which considers how personal, domestic, friendship circles and family circles of either target or perpetrator can offer support would be valuable, particularly for the affected individual who feels they either do not have, or cannot access organisational support. It may also be appropriate to consider professional and/or counselling support as a policy issue which can be afforded to any party, including witness, bystanders, investigators and line managers.

Research which considers links between claimants being managed under another formal organisational policy and making an allegation of bullying would offer valuable insight into the emerging concerns around bullying allegations being a means to an end (Branch et al., 2007a), made as retaliation for a refused request or in response to being managed. Managers who manage within the bounds of appropriate and reasonable behaviour, in accord with organisation policies may need some level of protection against vexatious or particularly overly-sensitive allegations.

What was also critically important to the researcher and significant to the participants, was the concern that they pondered whether their protected characteristics may be a reason why they had been subject to an allegation of workplace bullying and whether raising an allegation is in itself a bullying behaviour, a theory supported by Rospenda et al., (2009) but ripe for further consideration.

#### ***7.4 Chapter synopsis***

This chapter drew the thesis to a conclusion and explored key themes of the importance of HR structure, policy and practice, line manager devolved responsibility and how mediation could offer an early resolution to workplace conflict and workplace bullying related grievances. In exploring how support can be offered to the alleged bully there is an opportunity for organisations to review policy and practice to ensure the policy takes account of both parties as well as consider how they will make provision for the emerging concerns that not all

allegations may be as genuine as they seem. In reviewing the research questions the researcher demonstrated the aims and objectives of the study had been addressed and the resulting grounded theory model *guilty until proven innocent* offered an explanation of the participant's primary concerns. Mindful of the need to continue the discussion through this chapter in the context of extant literature, the conclusions relate and develop earlier work in discussing limitations of this research as well as offering suggestions for further valuable research.

The following chapter offers recommendations for which stem from the research undertaken in this study, which is designed to support organisations, HR functions and HR practitioners.

## **Chapter 8: Recommendations**

This study set out to understand the lived experience and organisational implications of being accused of workplace bullying, from the under-explored perspective of the (alleged) bully. The researcher considered and analysed the data from the participants and using grounded theory, developed the theoretical model guilty until proven innocent. The literature review and discussions chapters compared, contrasted and critiqued the participants' experiences with extant literature and acknowledged operational good practice. In identifying the core category of participants' concerns, through categories and sub-categories the following recommendations stem from the research.

The final chapter, chapter eight, gives recommendations and discusses how key HR or industry practitioners may develop their organisational policy, procedure or practice to address the key concerns which the (alleged) workplace bullies discussed. This chapter discusses seven areas for recommendations and action. The chapter and this thesis are brought to a close in the final synopsis.

### ***8.1 Organisational culture***

Organisations should embrace dignity at work more holistically as this will create a culture which has the strategic benefits of an organisation managing and reducing the costs and consequences of workplace bullying. Beale and Hoel (2011, p.8) note that the positive "promotion of dignity and respect at work" will have significantly more impact than a policy which focuses single-mindedly on bullying.

Work pressure and job insecurity were identified as being antecedents to workplace bullying (Einarsen, 2000; Lewis & Orford, 2005), however, management which is based on ethical principles of integrity, consideration and fairness will elicit improvements in employment relations (Hoel & Cooper, 2000). Identification of positive behaviours, which are demonstrated to workers will begin a gradual process of reinforced learning. This is however a long-term plan and commitment to demonstrate to bullies there are alternate ways of conducting themselves. This can similarly apply to anyone considered to have raised an allegation of bullying which is done to frustrate another formal process, as a means to an end of was vexatious.

Any recommendations implemented by organisations should be championed by the most senior group of leaders. To create an environment where workplace bullying and the instances of making an allegation to frustrate another formal process are not tolerated there will need to be determined leadership which not only supports and demonstrates positive acts and behaviours but is the living embodiment of what is acceptable to the organisation.

## ***8.2 HR Structure***

The challenge in HR functions has been discussed as a balancing act between ethically responsible provision as representative of the workforce and champion of the organisation's strategic objectives as a partner to the business. HR functions need to determine whether they will take on both of these mantles and if so, how the balance between the two will be struck. The connection between worker and remote Ulrich (1997) style of HR structure may be a key feature in the seeming disconnect between the two; facilitating how there can be a personnel style provision for workers to air problems has the potential to resolve many early workplace conflict issues before bullying develops and becomes entrenched.

## ***8.3 Anti-bullying policies***

Anti-bullying policies (or a wider holistic approach to dignity and respect discussed above) should confirm the organisations approach towards bullying, noting the definition and giving clear examples of what bullying is and what it is not. Namie and Namie (2009) note that the policy should outline conduct which is unacceptable, however policies which also discuss the positive behaviour that is expected may provide clearer guidance to workers and offer a support in the investigation of allegations.

Anti-bullying policies which expressly define performance management are helpful in establishing clear boundaries between that and workplace bullying. Performance management or frustration related allegations which stem from involvement in a formal process are not necessarily bullying although inappropriate management style or action may be. For example, an absence management policy which is clear on what actions will be taken (in following the process) should help to avoid a claim of bullying. It needs, however to be implemented and undertaken with appropriate management care and respect. Organisations may find it helpful to be clear on how other formal management processes happen and ensure this is communicated to staff at an early juncture. Training on attendance management, conduct/misconduct, performance and other formal policies should not be the preserve of

managers. Workers should have open and transparent access to policies so they are aware of processes and procedures prior to the formal stages of a policy apply to them. Any resulting allegation about the organisational process should then be addressed as such and not necessarily labelled as workplace bullying.

HR functions are best equipped through their overview and management of other formal procedures to acknowledge and develop awareness of conflicting pressures that workers experience as they undergo other formal management procedures. Fears for job security or for not being able to perform satisfactorily which are the result of being managed formally can breed bully-targets as well as bullies. HR functions can arrange for line managers to have HR support through coaching, mentoring, training and in the development of proficiency and confidence in softer skills and people management.

HR functions should consider the impact of the identifiable victim effect and put further training in place to raise awareness of this for HR staff, managers and investigating officers. Considering how influences in the recruitment and selection processes are minimised would provide an effective platform for adding identifiable victim effect to the good practitioner's toolkit. Coupled with the developing understanding that the first person to HR is not necessarily the victim and that it can be difficult to differentiate between targets and bullies; the HR function can make significant measures to support and safeguard all workers and the organisation.

## **8.4 Support mechanisms**

Provision of support is essential for the accused and the accuser. Not only could failure to meet the organisations responsibility of duty of care, it is also a matter of leading by example. An organisation cannot ostracise or isolate a worker who is accused of being a workplace bully and not expect there to be a negative impact; doing so could add to the perception of the accused they are deemed *guilty until proven innocent*. Accordingly, the provision of a comprehensive set of support mechanisms which overcomes and compliments restrictions around confidentiality should be considered, identified and offered.

Understanding the experience and perspective of the (alleged) bully raises awareness of the concerns and potential for biased, negative acts to be perpetrated on the (alleged) bully should they be deemed guilty from the outset; the lack of support for the (alleged) bully is symptomatic of this. Organisations could consider developing a more supportive structure,

where anyone, not just the accuser can access support and guidance. Targets, (alleged) bullies, witnesses and bystanders should all have access to support and engage in an informal early dispute resolution method.

Organisations may benefit from considering the role of the workplace representative, which could be internal or external to the organisation, such as trade union representatives or other trained workplace support, in offering support to all parties. Assertiveness training could be particularly useful and is often offered to targets. Provision of this support and development of the accused or (alleged) bully may also be effective.

The provision of support after the allegations have been investigated and the outcome recommendations actioned needs to be considered. Counselling, line manager support, mentoring and coaching may all prove valuable in offering closure for the (alleged) bully and in prevention of any recurrence of bullying behaviour.

## **8.5 Mediation**

Line manager led, local mediation style conversations could also offer early resolution to initial workplace conflict. This could be effected through non-judgemental and less destructive methods than a formal allegation of workplace bullying or a formal grievance and therefore be less damaging, time consuming and costly for all involved. CIPD (2015d) note that over 1 in every 4 workers have an on-going difficult relationship at work. Therefore informal approaches where workers can meet and discuss issues offers a common way of resolving issues and an available, visible and accessible HR function has a key role to play in effecting this.

Organisations should consider how it encourages workers to attempt local resolution rather than making a formal allegation and how it will up-skill managers to develop softer skills required to both support and manage their workers.

The provision of mediation is recommended and has been identified as bringing benefits in the significant reduction of costs, affording a speedier resolution and positive outcome in that it empowers both parties (Irvine, 2014). The implementation of a mediation strategy into the organisation will allow an early, less formal resolution method, particularly as a resolution may be arrived at before matters become entrenched. Mediation allows both parties to agree on a course of action and a solution in a confidential arena. As mediation is a voluntary

commitment, it can form part of the resolution routes and does not preclude a more formal management investigation at a later stage. What it does offer though is a chance for parties to understand each other's points of view and for them to reach an agreement on the conduct of their future working relationship.

Within the confines of the HR function it may be valuable to retain records of who attends mediation; this may not only provide useful data for reviewing trends and the success of the mediation, but importantly allow the identification of repeat attendees, whether accuser or accused.

## **8.6 Training**

Training delivered regularly but with a different approach is important, otherwise it becomes routine, loses impact and is seen as a 'tick box' activity. Training should be given to line managers regarding the role they play in terms of the HR policy and also in how they can effect early, rapid intervention. CIPD (2015d) notes that managers' awareness is more likely to resolve matters before they become entrenched. Line managers and supervisors who do identify and address low-level conflict can achieve effective resolutions but they must feel confident and supported by the organisation to be able to do this. Workplace bullying, anti-bullying, zero-tolerance or dignity at work training should be mandatory and not just offered to line managers. If all workers, not just those with supervisory or managerial responsibility have raised awareness of issues of workplace bullying, their organisation also demonstrates its values and clearly marks what acceptable behaviour is and is not. Widening knowledge and understanding of the behaviours, costs, consequences and organisational actions that will be used to address issues has not only reducing bullying may also reduce levels of discrimination and turnover. In raising awareness of issues of workplace bullying, organisations demonstrate it treats the issue seriously and defines what is workplace bullying and what it is not.

Chipps and McRury (2012) identified that a successful workplace training and/or raising awareness session around workplace bullying would enable the delegates to identify bullying behaviours. Going beyond a 'chalk and talk' training session, training should be practical so that it encourages delegates to explore and express concerns; Stagg and Sheridan (2010) found that developing cognitively rehearsed responses during the training environment resulted in stopping negative acts before bullying became established and escalated. Line managers need actual skill development which transfers from classroom to workplace in order



to add value; this may include how to manage in the first place as well as keeping skills refreshed and updated.

### ***8.7 Chapter synopsis***

The final chapter of this thesis drew on the participants' experiences, the extant literature and operational practice, the widening discussion around core concerns of (alleged) bullies and made recommendations for their support. HR functions will need to consider structure, policy and operational practice in developing robust procedures which are mindful identifiable victim effect, the support to all involved in issues concerning workplace bullying.

It is perhaps pertinent to remember the adage, there are two sides to every story and the truth lies somewhere in between. One may consider that there are three sides to every story, what the (alleging) target thinks happened, what the (alleged) bully thinks happened and what really happened. Getting to the final point is difficult, creates 'winners' and 'losers', making resolution for individuals and organisations difficult. It is perhaps time to begin to think of how resolutions for workplace bullying can be effected at an earlier juncture than they currently are and how both the alleged and the alleger can both be heard and supported.

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# Appendices

## **Appendix 1 Informal brief to potential participants**

Initial e-mail brief to potential participants

## **Appendix 2 Formal letter to potential participants**

Fuller letter of details for potential participants

## **Appendix 3 Consent forms for participants**

Participant consent forms

## **Appendix 4 University of Huddersfield Ethics Committee approval**

University of Huddersfield Ethics Committee approval, submission and review

## **Appendix 5 Post interview pro-forma**

Post interview pro-forma

## **Appendix 6 Dilbert Calendar extract**

Dilbert calendar extract

## **Appendix 7 Theoretical model: Guilty until proven innocent**

Larger version of the *guilty until proven innocent* theoretical model

## **Appendix 1 Informal brief to potential participants**

### **INFORMAL BRIEFING NOTE FOR EMAIL OR DISCUSSION**

**Hello/Dear PARTICIPANT**

Thank you for your enquiry and possible interest in this research. I will try to give you some information about the study, but if you would like to meet to have just a preliminary discussion, I would be happy to do so.

I know **INTRODUCING CONTACT** through my role **as volunteer Chair of the West Yorkshire branch of CIPD** and for my 'day job' I have been a senior lecturer in HR Management for almost one year at the University of Huddersfield, having worked for 7 1/2 years in policing and many more years before that in banking. I held both operational and strategic HR roles and my interest in the field of workplace bullying started whilst at the bank, when I supported a friend of mine through a grievance and then mediation following a series of difficult bullying episodes. I went on to complete an MA and looked at bullying in policing and I am now wanting to explore, what I think is, a key omission in the research to date which is the experience of the alleged bully.

As I wrote in the e-mail to **INTRODUCING CONTACT**, there has been only one study on this and this was done in Australia; finding participants for the study was a challenge and it strikes me that if the phenomenon is as widespread as many commentators state, then seeking participants could perhaps be easier than it is. This is of course, charged with rhetoric and doesn't account for the devastating impact an allegation could make on someone's career, personal and private life.

The study aims to consider the experiences of alleged or accused perpetrators (this is an academically accepted term) to consider themes which emerge and how organisational practices may be better designed to manage the requisite process as well as support all the individuals involved. I am using a methodology that looks for themes in the separate participants' experiences in order to identify the main focus or issue; it will not be a full re-telling of what took place. The methodology is a better way of preserving anonymity and ensuring confidentiality. All academic research proposals at the university must be considered by the Ethics Committee and I have been giving their full sanction to undertake the study; this means that on all levels the research is considered reliable, valid, ethical, not harmful and is a worthwhile contribution to knowledge and practice.

I am at the stage where I am starting to interview participants and I would welcome your involvement, perhaps you would let me know if there is anything further I can let you know about?

Kind regards

**Fran**

**Frances McGregor Chartered FCIPD MA HRM**  
**Senior Lecturer in HR Management**

## ***Appendix 2 Formal letter to potential participants***

**The Business School  
Department of People, Management & Organisations  
University of Huddersfield  
Queensgate  
Huddersfield  
HD1 3DH**

**T: 01484 472557**

**DD MONTH 2014**

Dear **PARTICIPANT**

### Doctoral Research Study in Workplace Bullying

You are being invited to participate in a research study on people's experience of being alleged of bullying. In particular, I am interested in understanding your experience around being accused and the level of support, or otherwise, you felt you were given by your employer/organisation. This study makes no differentiation regarding the outcome of the allegations, that is to say whether you were found 'innocent' or 'guilty' is not the purpose of this study.

In order to listen to your experiences, you will be interviewed and this will require about 1-2 hours of your time. The interviews will be conducted wherever you prefer and will be tape-recorded.

This research has received approval from the Ethics Committee of the University of Huddersfield and there are no anticipated risks or discomforts related to this research. I will be interviewing you and I can give you the name and telephone number of some counselling and/or mental health services, if you feel this information would be helpful for you.

You may find this interview to be therapeutic as people who have been accused of bullying do not get to share their experiences; the interviewer will allow you to give your story and will be non-judgemental. Your participation may also support recommendations for enhanced organisational practice and awareness of the experience of being accused of bullying.

In order to protect your identity and to preserve your anonymity several measures will be taken. Whilst the interviews will be tape recorded, the tapes will be destroyed once they have been transcribed. The typed records will not include any identifying information, such as your name, your organisation's name and anything else you wish to be included. The

electronic copies of the interview will be maintained securely, password protected, in the University of Huddersfield's IT systems.

A typed copy of the interview will also be held in a locked filing cabinet at the University of Huddersfield; access to both physical and electronic documents is confined to me and no one else will be able to see them.

You are a voluntary participant in this research; you may withdraw from the study at any time for any reason. If you do this, all information from you will be destroyed. You may wish to see a copy of the interview transcript in order to confirm it is an accurate reflection of the interview and to advise if there is identifying information for removal. Please let me know if this is the case.

The results from this study will form part of my doctoral studies at the University of Huddersfield and may also be presented in writing in journals read by academics, HR practitioners and other interested parties to develop organisational practice, support offered to (alleged) bullies as well as understanding the experience from the accused's perspective. The research may also be presented to conferences, attended by the same groups; your identity and/or any identifying details will not be discussed or revealed. If you wish to receive a copy of the results of this study, please speak to me about this. It is anticipated that the study will be completed on or before November 2015.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your participation.

Yours sincerely

Kind regards

*Fran*

**Frances McGregor Chartered FCIPD MA HRM**  
**Senior Lecturer in HR Management**

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University of Huddersfield Business School  
University of Huddersfield | Queensgate | Huddersfield | HD1 3DH | UK



## Appendix 3 Consent forms for participants

└ PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Title of Research Project: Working Title: The Bully: Who me?

Name of Researcher: Frances McGregor

**Participant Identification Number for this project:**

**Please initial:**

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information letter dated **DD MONTH 2014** explaining the above research project and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the project. ☐
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason and without there being any negative consequences. In addition, should I not wish to answer any particular question or questions, I am free to decline. ☐
3. I understand that my responses will be held and treated in the strictest of confidence. I give permission for Frances McGregor of the research team to have access to my anonymised interview transcript. I understand that my name will not be linked with the research materials and I will not be identified or identifiable in the report or reports that result from the research. ☐
4. I agree for the data collected from me to be used in future research. ☐
5. I agree to take part in the above research project. ☐

Name of Participant	Date	Signature
Lead Researcher	Date	Signature

Copies:

*Once this has been signed by all parties the participant will receive a copy of the signed and dated participant consent form, the information letter and any other written information provided to the participants, if required. A copy of the signed and dated consent form will be placed in the project's main record, which will be kept in a secure location.*

## Appendix 4 University of Huddersfield Ethics Committee approval

### Frances-Louise McGregor

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**From:** Alex Thompson  
**Sent:** 10 January 2014 14:32  
**To:** Frances-louise McGregor U0369306; Frances-Louise McGregor  
**Cc:** Jan Carmichael; Annie Yeadon-Lee; Eleanor Davies  
**Subject:** FW: Ethics form - BUSETHICS13/14/007  
**Attachments:** reviewer proforma BUSETHICS1314 007 Dec 13.doc; reviewer proforma BUSETHICS1314 007.doc

Dear Frances,

I have been asked to forward the following to you:

Following consideration of the two reports from the reviewers, the decision is to approve outright.  
Dr Eleanor Davies  
Chair of the Business School Ethics Committee

Attached are the comment forms from the Reviewers.

Regards,

**Alex Thompson**

Course Administrator

T: 01484 472528

✉: [a.thompson@hud.ac.uk](mailto:a.thompson@hud.ac.uk)

🌐: [www.hud.ac.uk](http://www.hud.ac.uk)

University of Huddersfield Business School

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Twitter: <http://twitter.com/#!/UoHBusinessSch>

**From:** Annie Yeadon-Lee  
**Sent:** 16 December 2013 11:20  
**To:** Alex Thompson  
**Subject:** Ethics form

Alex  
Please find attached Frances McGregors ethics form for approval

Best Wishes  
Annie

Dr Annie Yeadon-Lee BA (Hons) MA PGCE PhD FHEA  
Course Director : Doctor of Business/Public Administration (DBA/DPA)  
Senior Lecturer in Organisational Behaviour and Management Learning  
University of Huddersfield Business School  
Department of Leadership and Management  
Queensgate

**THE UNIVERSITY OF HUDDERSFIELD**  
**Business School**

**POSTGRADATE STUDENT / STAFF RESEARCH ETHICAL REVIEW**

Please complete and return via email to [alex.thompson@hud.ac.uk](mailto:alex.thompson@hud.ac.uk) along with the required documents (shown below).

**SECTION A: TO BE COMPLETED BY THE APPLICANT**

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Before completing this section please refer to the Business School Research Ethics web pages which can be under Resources on the UniLearn site (Ethics Policies and Procedures). Applicants should consult the appropriate ethical guidelines.

Please ensure that the statements in Section C are completed by the applicant (and supervisor for PGR students) prior to submission.

Project Title	Working title: The bully; who me?
Applicant	Frances-Louise McGregor
Award (where applicable)	Doctorate in Business Administration
Project start date	Course runs 9/2011 to 8/2015

**SECTION B: PROJECT OUTLINE (TO BE COMPLETED IN FULL BY THE APPLICANT)**

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<b>Issue</b>	<b>Please provide sufficient detail for your supervisor to assess strategies used to address ethical issues in the research proposal. Forms with insufficient detail will need to be resubmitted.</b>
Researcher(s) details	Frances-Louise McGregor
Supervisor details	Jan Carmichael – Supervisor Annie Yeadon-Lee – Course Director
<b>Aims and objectives of the study.</b> Please state the aims and objectives of the study.	<p>The purpose of this research is to critically evaluate the lived experience and organisational implications of being accused of bullying, from the perspective of the accused.</p> <p>The research objectives are:</p> <p>Obj 1 – to critically evaluate previous workplace studies of adult bullying with a focus on the bully's perspective, Obj 2 – to understand the experience of being accused of being a workplace bully; to listen to the accused's own story, Obj 3 – to evaluate the accused's perception of their organisation's support mechanisms offered to them during the whole course of the procedure and beyond,</p>



	<p>Obj 4 – to evaluate the accused’s perception of the organisation’s support mechanisms offered to their accuser and how this may have differed from their offering,</p> <p>Obj 5 – to offer a voice to the study participants with a view to considering recommendations for organisations to support all staff involved.</p> <p>It is not the purpose of this research to consider the perspective, view or opinion of the worker raising the issue of their feeling and/or being bullying in the work place; this is not to say that this should be ignored or overlooked, simply that this research is intended to look at the discussion from an alternate angle in order to consider effective and organisational policy support mechanisms for all staff involved. Thus, the study will contribute to the body of knowledge around the workplace phenomenon of bullying and offer an insight into further development of business practice.</p>
<p><b>Brief overview of research methodology</b></p> <p>The methodology only needs to be explained in sufficient detail to show the approach used (e.g. survey) and explain the research methods to be used during the study.</p>	<p>It is with the acknowledged understanding (Jenkins et al, 2011) that the researcher considers there to be a gap in the literature around the effective organisational and individual experience of bullying that this research intends to collate, analyse and present the views of the (alleged) bully. The research will use a qualitative study based on comparative case study with interviews where participants are invited to relive their experience. Using grounded theory (Glaser &amp; Strauss, 1967 and Strauss &amp; Corbin, 1998, 2008) one participant reliving interview (Horn, 2012) will be used to consider whether the next has similarities or not to the core themes of the first. Data will be analysed through the creation of categories which will be developed as a result of the first or earlier reliving interview’s analysis rather than by the review of literature of the researcher’s (pre)conceived idea. The emerging inductive construction of abstract categories will be sampled and refined in order to strengthen, or weaken the core categories.</p>
<p><b>Does your study require any permissions for study?</b> If so, please give details</p>	<p>None other than this University of Huddersfield Ethical Approval and the agreement of participants.</p>
<p><b>Participants</b></p> <p>Please outline who will participate in your research. Might any of the participants be considered ‘vulnerable’ (e.g. children)</p>	<p>This research will be undertaken with a purposive sample of self-nominating volunteer participants who have been accused of bullying; there will be no differentiation regarding any outcome, that is to say whether they were found ‘innocent’ or ‘guilty’ as this is not the purpose of this study.</p>
<p><b>Access to participants</b></p> <p>Please give details about how participants will be identified and contacted.</p>	<p>Volunteers will be sought from a discussion on social media and word of mouth referrals. The researcher acknowledges this strategy affords only a random but purposive sample there is also a need for discretion in order to maximise the likelihood of volunteers coming forward.</p>

	<p>The researcher is a well-known figure within the West Yorkshire HR community in her role as Chair of the West Yorkshire Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development. This provides a wide network of contacts that may be useful in the (passive) recruitment of volunteer participants.</p> <p>The researcher has already been approached on three/four separate occasions by two individuals who wish to participate in the study; this may suggest that there is perhaps an opportunity for the (alleged) bully to have a voice as a result of the researcher's genuine interest in this field of study and that the word of mouth referral is a workable approach.</p>
<b>How will your data be recorded and stored?</b>	Data will be recorded and stored in coded form, password protected at a single site and in accordance with the Data Protection Act, 1998. All data, transcripts, notes, physical or IT files will be maintained by the researcher personally with due care and diligence. Handwritten notes will be electronically scanned and paper copies destroyed appropriately.
<b>Informed consent.</b> Please outline how you will obtain informed consent.	The researcher will be approached by potential participants as a result of either a word of mouth or social media referral. There will be a discussion about the research, aims, purpose, method and results and if appropriate, an interview will be arranged. By attending such interview, the participant will have given implicit consent and this will be concluded by forwarding a copy of the notes/transcripts for the participant to confirm they agree to it being used in the study. Actually how this takes place (face to face, electronically, voice recording) will be participant led.
<b>Confidentiality</b> Please outline the level of confidentiality you will offer respondents and how this will be respected. You should also outline about who will have access to the data and how it will be stored. (This information should be included on Information your information sheet.)	Working in consultation with the participants, the research will ensure that names and biographical details of all parties, organisations, locations, will be hygiened from the data collected. Data will be accessible only to the researcher and the use of an internally recognised University of Huddersfield transcription service will ensure confidentiality and respect.
<b>Anonymity</b> If you offer your participants anonymity, please indicate how this will be achieved.	Anonymity will be further preserved by ensuring that data is held in coded form, password protected at a single site and in accordance with the Data Protection Act, 1998. All data, transcripts, notes, physical or IT files will be maintained by the researcher personally with due care and diligence.
<b>Harm</b> Please outline your assessment of the extent to which your research might induce psychological stress, anxiety, cause harm or negative consequences for the participants (beyond the risks encountered in normal life). If more than minimal risk, you should outline what support there will be for participants.	The researcher acknowledges that a person who may have been affected by a serious episode at work might be distressed in relating the details. It is certainly not the aim of the research to cause upset or distress; Horn (2012) notes that research should do no harm. The researcher is a qualified mediator, mentor and has many years' experience in senior HR management posts, this

If you believe that that there is minimal likely harm, please articulate why you believe this to be so.	brings an understanding and ability to support and manage any distress effectively.  Using The University of Huddersfield's descriptor of "vulnerable", the researcher does not consider the participants meet this assessment.
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**Retrospective applications.** If your application for Ethics approval is retrospective, please explain why this has arisen.

Whilst on holiday the researcher was sharing details of the research in amiable conversation; this was before the ethical approval had been discussed within her research group. The conversation became a reliving narrative from the potential participant and the researcher documented the story in note form afterwards as it was an unplanned opportunity which presented itself. The researcher would choose to use this in the study as it had been a particularly detailed experience and appropriate to use as a pilot study.

The Ethics Committee's approval to use this in the form of an initial pilot study would be appreciated.

## SECTION C – SUMMARY OF ETHICAL ISSUES (TO BE COMPLETED BY THE APPLICANT)

Please give a summary of the ethical issues and any action that will be taken to address the issue(s).

Ethical issues are considered to be minimal with this research; participants will be drawn from volunteers who will make initial contact with the researcher, thus will be self-nominating.

At this time there is no interview structure or schedule; the initial question will be "Tell me how it came about you were accused of being a bully..." Subsequent interviews will endeavour to ensure that if the participant does not discuss the emerging grounded theory themes then the researcher will ask a similar open question prompting further reliving/retelling.

The researcher is a well-known figure within the West Yorkshire HR community in her role as Chair of the West Yorkshire Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development and holds the esteemed position of being a Chartered Fellow with an honorary ambassadorial role in the Institute.

The Institute has a Code of Conduct (CIPD, 2012) for HR professionals which all members must abide by. As a Chartered Fellow of the Institute, such recognition demonstrates her competence, knowledge and acknowledges her experience.

## SECTION D – ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTS CHECKLIST (TO BE COMPLETED BY THE APPLICANT)

**Please supply copies of all relevant supporting documentation electronically. If this is not available electronically, please provide explanation and supply hard copy.**

I have included the following documents – attached to end of this application

Information sheet                      Yes    ☒                      Not applicable    ☐

Consent form                              Yes    ☐                      Not applicable    ☒

Letters    Yes    ☐                      Not applicable    ☒

Questionnaire	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	Not applicable <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Interview schedule	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	Not applicable <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

#### SECTION E – STATEMENT BY APPLICANT

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I confirm that the information I have given in this form on ethical issues is correct. (Electronic confirmation is sufficient).

Applicant name *Frances McGregor*

Date *6 December 2013*

#### **Affirmation by Supervisor**

I have read the Ethical Review Checklist and I can confirm that, to the best of my understanding, the information presented by the Applicant is correct and appropriate to allow an informed judgement on whether further ethical approval is required

Supervisor name *Jan Carmichael*

Date *12 December 2013*

**All documentation must be submitted electronically to the Business School Ethics Committee Administrator Alex Thompson at [alex.thompson@hud.ac.uk](mailto:alex.thompson@hud.ac.uk).**

**All proposals will be reviewed by two members of SREP. If it is considered necessary to discuss the proposal with the full Committee, the applicant (and their supervisor if the applicant is a student) will be invited to attend the next Ethics Committee meeting.**

**If you have any queries relating to the completion of this form or any other queries relating to the Business School's Ethics Committee in consideration of this proposal, please do not hesitate to contact the Chair, Dr Eleanor Davies ([e.davies@hud.ac.uk](mailto:e.davies@hud.ac.uk)) ☎ [47] 2121 or the Administrator Alex Thomson ([alex.thompson@hud.ac.uk](mailto:alex.thompson@hud.ac.uk)) ☎ [47] 2529**

## **PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET**

### **Research Title: The bully; who me?**

Researcher: Frances McGregor Chartered FCIPD MA HRM

Thank you for your interest in the research into the impact of workplace bullying. To date, research has focused on the support, investigation and management from the worker raising a bullying related complaint. This research intends to develop an understanding of the (alleged) bully's experience.

It is not important for the purposes of this study whether the participants were found guilty or not, whether the claim against them was proven or not, but an opportunity to develop an understanding of your perspective with a view to begin a discussion around further best management practice for all parties involved.

The aim of the research is to critically evaluate the lived experience and organisational implications of being accused for bullying, from the perspective of the accused.

The objectives of the research are:

- 1 – to critically evaluate previous workplace studies of adult bullying with a focus on the bully's perspective,
- 2 – to understand the experience of being accused of being a workplace bully; to listen to the accused's own story,
- 3 – to evaluate the accused's perception of their organisation's support mechanisms offered to them during the whole course of the procedure and beyond,
- 4 – to evaluate the accused's perception of the organisation's support mechanisms offered to their accuser and how this may have differed from their offering,
- 5 – to offer a voice to the study participants with a view to considering recommendations for organisations to support all staff involved.

As a participant, you will be invited to describe your experience to the researcher and this will be recorded for later transcription. The narrative will then be analysed against others for key or recurring themes and an evaluation of your story, organisational support and possible recommendations for better or good practice will be formulated as a result. This work will be contained within a dissertation which the researcher will submit in the course of her Doctor in Business Administration studies.

All collected information will be confidential. To ensure this, it will be recorded and stored in coded form, password protected at a single site and in accordance with the Data Protection Act, 1998. All data, transcripts, notes, physical or IT files will be maintained by the researcher personally with due care and diligence. Handwritten notes will be electronically scanned and paper copies destroyed appropriately.

Although you may give your implied consent by meeting with the researcher, this will be concluded by forwarding a copy of the notes/transcripts for the participant to confirm they agree to it being used in the study. You will be asked how you would like to do this; at interview, face to face, e-mail, etc.

Working in consultation with the researcher, names and biographical details of all parties, organisations, locations, will be hygiened from the data collected. Data will be accessible only to the researcher and the use of an internally recognised University of Huddersfield transcription service will ensure confidentiality and respect.

You are welcome to see a copy of the final dissertation, it is anticipated this will be available in October 2015.

**THE UNIVERSITY OF HUDDERSFIELD**  
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**Reviewer Proforma.**

<b>Project Title:</b>	Working title: The bully; who me?
<b>Name of researcher (s):</b>	Frances-Louise McGregor
<b>Supervisor (where appropriate):</b>	Jan Carmichael
<b>Reviewer name</b>	Dr Messaoud Mehafdi
<b>Date sent to reviewer</b>	16/12/13
<b>Target date for review</b>	23/12/13

<b>Issue</b>	<b>Advice / Comments to applicant</b>
<b>Aim / objectives of the study</b>	
<b>Research methodology</b>	<p>This section is a little ambiguous. For example,</p> <p>1) check these statements:</p> <p>“The research will use a qualitative study based on comparative case study....”</p> <p>“...will be used to consider whether the next has similarities or not to the core themes of the first”.</p> <p>“ ....through he creation”</p> <p>2) There is no mention of formal procedures, for example how the institution that employs/ed the accused defines and deals with bullying cases. Just relying on the accused reliving an event can be fraught with subjectivities and non-factual evidence.</p>
<b>Permissions for study?</b>	No issues

<b>Participants</b>	No issues
<b>Access to participants</b>	No issues
<b>How will your data be recorded and stored?</b>	No issues
<b>Confidentiality</b>	No issues
<b>Anonymity</b>	No issues
<b>Could the research induce psychological stress or anxiety, cause harm or negative consequences for the participants (beyond the risks encountered in normal life).</b>	Difficult to tell as it very much depends on the gravity of the case that the person experienced, its outcomes and long-term impact. However, as target participants are expected to willingly participate in this project, and I am assuming, they have the choice to withdraw from the study at any time, then there should not be any type of harm from the intended study.
<b>Retrospective applications.</b>	No issues
<b>Supporting documents (e.g. questionnaire, interview schedule, letters etc)</b>	No available
<b>Other comments</b>	none

## OVERALL RESPONSE

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<b>APPROVE OUTRIGHT</b>	
<b>APPROVE SUBJECT TO MINOR CONDITIONS [please specify]</b>	<b>Clarify issues mentioned above about research methodology</b>
<b>RESUBMISSION REQUIRED (application to be re-examined by Reviewers)</b>	
<b>REJECT</b>	

Reviewer name: Dr Messaoud Mehafdi

Date 23 Dec 2013

**THE UNIVERSITY OF HUDDERSFIELD**  
**Business School**

**Reviewer Proforma.**

<b>Project Title:</b>	Working title: The bully; who me?
<b>Name of researcher (s):</b>	Frances-Louise McGregor
<b>Supervisor (where appropriate):</b>	Jan Carmichael
<b>Reviewer name</b>	
<b>Date sent to reviewer</b>	16/12/13
<b>Target date for review</b>	23/12/13

<b>Issue</b>	<b>Advice / Comments to applicant</b>
<b>Aim / objectives of the study</b>	Yes
<b>Research methodology</b>	Yes – although as a note careful consideration needs to be given towards the ideology of grounded theory specifically in the context of how a researcher enters their research context without a pre-conceived problem statement, interview protocols or extensive review of literature
<b>Permissions for study?</b>	Yes
<b>Participants</b>	Yes and noted
<b>Access to participants</b>	Yes and noted
<b>How will your data be recorded and stored?</b>	Evidenced
<b>Confidentiality</b>	Suggested to but not evidenced
<b>Anonymity</b>	Suggested to but not evidenced



<b>Could the research induce psychological stress or anxiety, cause harm or negative consequences for the participants (beyond the risks encountered in normal life).</b>	N/A
<b>Retrospective applications.</b>	N/A
<b>Supporting documents (e.g. questionnaire, interview schedule, letters etc)</b>	Suggested to but not evidenced
<b>Other comments</b>	

## OVERALL RESPONSE

---

<b>APPROVE OUTRIGHT</b>	
<b>APPROVE SUBJECT TO MINOR CONDITIONS [please specify]</b>	<b>Yes</b>
<b>RESUBMISSION REQUIRED (application to be re-examined by Reviewers)</b>	
<b>REJECT</b>	

**Reviewer name David Higgins**

**Date 19/Dec/2013**

## **Appendix 5 Post interview pro-forma**

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### *Post-interview review*

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#### **PARTICIPANT**

.....

When am I completing this check-list?

#### **INTERVIEW DETAILS**

Date .....

Time started ..... Time concluded.....

The venue/setting .....

Busy/quiet .....

Building/room .....

Others in the vicinity .....

Layout of the room .....

#### **THOUGHTS AND OBSERVATIONS ABOUT THE PARTICIPANT**

Talkative?

Cooperative?

Reflective?

Nervous?

Attire?

#### **MY IMMEDIATE REFLECTIONS**

Did this open up new avenues of interest?

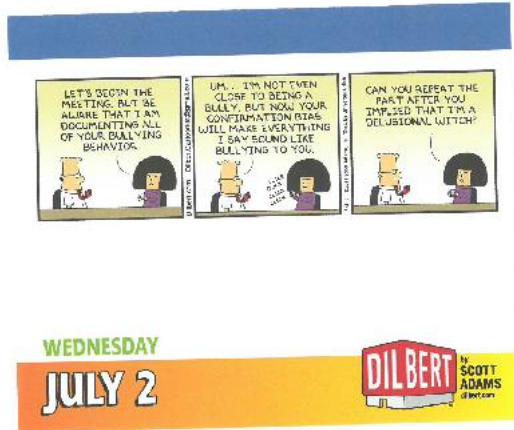
New thoughts around concepts/categories/codes?

What were my own feelings?

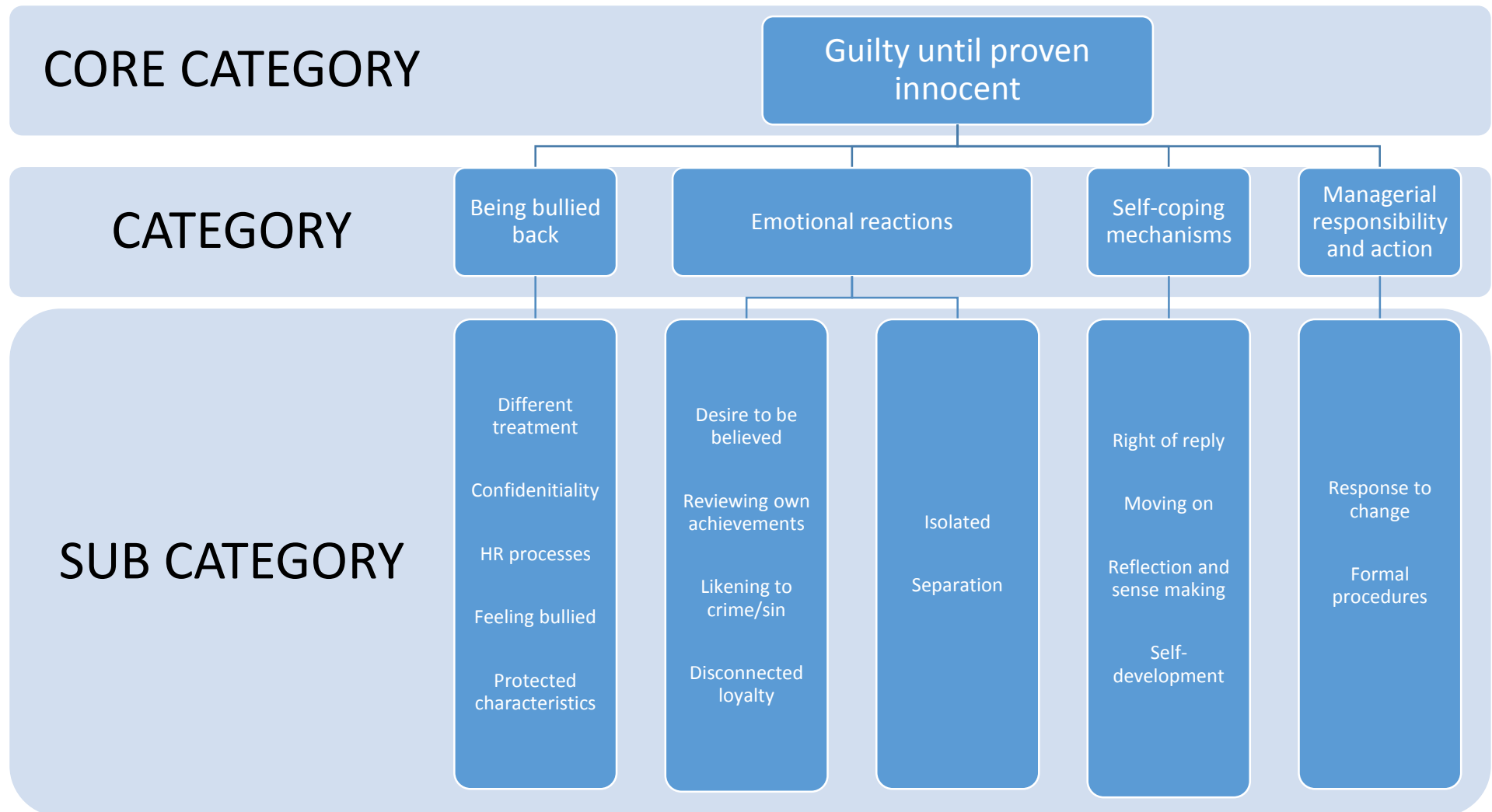
How would I rate my efforts?

How could I improve my interviewing/reflection?

## Appendix 6 Dilbert Calendar extract



**Appendix 7 Theoretical model: Guilty until proven innocent**



*Codes that formulated the sub-categories in the theoretical model guilty until proven innocent*

Guilty until proven innocent			
Being bullied back	Emotional reactions	Self-coping mechanisms	Managerial responsibility and action
Deliberate misrepresentation	Feeling lost	Self-health check	Having to manage
Excluded from confidentiality	Feeling lonely	Welfare concerns	Aftermath
Being harassed	Isolated	Proving innocence	Organisational issue
Bullied as a result	Separation	Admission by omission	Personally unintended
Feeling resigned	Out in the cold / exposed	Finding friends	Refusal to be overly fair
Being unsupported	Shock	Relying on credibility	Acceptable underperformance
Seemingly on trial	Feeling ignored	Being talked about	Self-preservation
Feelings of "the worst thing ever"	Feeling voiceless	Seeking counselling	Formal policy
Adversarial	Total brand loyalty	Self-doubt	Concentrated mis-behaviour
Opinionated HR	Unrecognised	Inability to gain closure	No 'next step'
Personal identifiers	Maintaining professionalism	Claim and counter claim	Can't not know
Protecting own characteristics	Limiting own decision making	Acknowledging proud moments	Organisational change
Unbalanced procedures	Wary of others	Vindication	Keeping pace with progress
One rule of one...	Walking on eggshells	Mediation	Develop performance
Losing confidence	Hierarchy gaps / no managerial support	Self-development – work	Evidence role requirements
Feeling stigmatised	Self-interrogation	Self-development – personal	Asking 'what next?'
		Toughening up	Putting things right